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# Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and the Hermeneutics of Tradition:

A Theological Reading of Jeremiah 7:1–15 and 26:1–24

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
To the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University

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# Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and the Hermeneutics of Tradition:

## A Theological Reading of Jeremiah 7:1–15 and 26:1–24

Jonathan D. Bental

Reading the Old Testament confronts interpreters with the hermeneutical interrelationship between theological traditions that have contributed to the production and growth of the canonical text and interpretative traditions that seek to understand it within a contemporary context. In the present study, Jeremiah's temple sermon constitutes an illuminating case study in the ways that hermeneutical frameworks influence the interpretation of biblical literature, as well as an opportunity to explore the possible resources that contemporary theological traditions might offer for understanding texts that have been shaped by ancient theological traditions. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a theologically-oriented reading of the two accounts of the temple sermon in Jeremiah 7:1–15 and 26:1–24 from the perspective of the Christian tradition. I argue that both texts may be understood to communicate a conditional message of judgment aimed at provoking the repentance of its audience, and that the hermeneutical relationship between the two texts reinforces this interpretation. The first two chapters provide an orientation to the subject matter and approach of the thesis, as well as an extended critique of two existing frameworks that have influenced the modern understanding of the temple sermon. The third chapter then proposes a reframing of the discussion, by focusing upon the nature of tradition in philosophical and theological perspectives. Chapters four and five offer extended theological readings of Jeremiah 7:1–15 and 26:1–24, respectively, seeking to demonstrate that contemporary theological discourse may provide potentially illuminating resources for biblical interpretation.



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*For Kelsie:*

אשת חיל את

*To Ella, Harper and Wesley:*

יברכך יהוה וישמרך

יאר יהוה פניו אליך ויחנך

ישא יהוה פניו אליך וישם לך שלום

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Jon Bentall  
Durham  
21<sup>st</sup> May, 2017

## 1. Introduction: Prophet, Book and Tradition

The relationship between prophet and temple, or in more general terms between prophecy and the cult, has long been among the most significant and complex issues in the study of the Old Testament (OT). Infamous in this regard, of course, is Julius Wellhausen, who postulated a stark conflict between prophetic and priestly literature, and who exhibited a marked preference for the ‘spiritual genius’ of prophetic religion over against the ‘dead legalism’ of the later priestly influence. Admittedly, OT scholarship has come a long way since the era of Wellhausen’s greatest influence, and few today would willingly align themselves with either the historical reconstruction of his *Prolegomena*, or the oft-noticed Protestant bias undergirding and informing it. However, it might be suggested that a prejudice is never more influential than when one imagines it to be absent or resolved, and it is arguably the case that traces of the great German scholar’s influence remain, not least when it comes to the relationship between prophetic and priestly interests within biblical literature.<sup>1</sup> In part, the impetus for the present study lies in a conviction that the interpretation of the two accounts of the so-called temple sermon in Jeremiah 7:1–15 and 26:1–24 continues to exhibit evidence of some of the problematic tendencies associated with Wellhausen’s approach, and that a reevaluation of both exegetical conclusions and hermeneutical frameworks in relation to these texts is therefore warranted.<sup>2</sup>

Wellhausen’s legacy might be regarded as a cautionary tale, a case study demonstrating the potential that implicit hermeneutical and theological judgments have to shape, and perhaps even to badly distort, one’s construal of biblical literature.

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<sup>1</sup> On the issue of a distinctly Protestant bias influencing modern biblical criticism in problematic ways, see Levenson, “Theological Consensus,” idem., “Temple and World,” and Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice and Temple*.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of the interpretative tendencies and assumptions that this project seeks to counter may be found in Wright, “Security and Faith,” and “God Amidst His People,” as well as the following remark by Clements in *God and Temple*, 84 (my emphasis): “The opposition to the temple and its cult was taken up even more forcibly by Jeremiah, *who saw it as a superstitious fetish*, which was blinding the people to a true faith in Yahweh.” Interestingly, similar approaches to the interpretation of this text and to the subject of the temple in the book of Jeremiah may be found in the work of Jewish scholars, including Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 135; 256, n. 56, and Leuchter, “Medium and Message,” 212–213.

On such a view, a healthy recognition of the problems in Wellhausen's approach are part and parcel of the rationale behind methodological proposals that advocate for a complete separation between dogmatic and descriptive forms of biblical theology, or else a form of biblical criticism as a purely *wissenschaftlich* discourse, in which the contemporary theological convictions, questions, and concerns of confessional communities are assiduously bracketed and/or decidedly irrelevant. By contrast, however, recent decades have witnessed a growing body of scholarship that advocates a more explicitly and robustly theological hermeneutic in the interpretation of the Bible (OT and NT), claiming that the best antidote to the influence of problematic theological presuppositions may in fact be more detailed and critical attention to the relationship between theological discourse and biblical exegesis rather than an attempt to keep the two disciplines immune from one another.

It is within this latter frame of reference that I seek to make a contribution to the understanding of Jeremiah's temple sermon. The purpose of the present study is twofold, and its dual aims are interrelated: (1) I will defend the thesis that the two accounts of the temple sermon in Jeremiah 7:1–15 and 26:1–24 may be understood, individually and together, to articulate a conditional message of divine judgement that is aimed at soliciting the repentance of its audience; (2) I will propose an explicitly theological hermeneutic, focused on the nature of tradition, as a framework for the interpretation of these texts that is capable of doing justice both to elements of literary and theological complexity, and to the subject matter of the material in its canonical form.<sup>3</sup> In this introductory chapter I provide a brief orientation to both the textual focus and the hermeneutical framework of the study. On the one hand, I am inclined to resist the conventional features of the dissertation genre often entitled *Literature Review* and *Methodology* for both pragmatic and theoretical reasons;<sup>4</sup> on the other hand, it will be

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<sup>3</sup> In other words, the hermeneutical argument of the thesis may be understood as a framework that lends plausibility and coherence to my reading of the Jeremianic texts, while the more exegetically-based material may be understood to function as case studies that illustrate the hermeneutical argument and explore its implications.

<sup>4</sup> First, my survey of previous research on the book of Jeremiah, and on the temple sermon in particular, is selective and illustrative; more comprehensive reviews are available and are cited in what follows, and it seems unnecessary to reproduce that material here. Second, in the wake of the influence of Gadamer, Ricoeur, and others, there is good reason to resist the characteristically modern epistemological assumption that one may simply establish a method and then apply it to a text without continuing to reflect on hermeneutical assumptions and

worthwhile to provide a sketch of how I understand the present study to be situated in relation to ongoing conversations in the fields of Jeremiah studies and theological hermeneutics. Therefore, what follows is by no means an exhaustive account of either area of study, but rather an orientation by way of engagement with representative voices in each field.

The aim of this introductory chapter is to introduce the two accounts of the temple sermon and their relationship to one another within both the context of the book of Jeremiah and the field of Jeremiah studies. In addition, I will introduce the hermeneutical approach of the study and seek to illustrate how it might contribute not only to discussions of theological interpretation but also to Jeremiah studies and the discourse of biblical criticism more generally. To anticipate briefly, these texts constitute an illuminating case study for the possibility of a critical, theological interpretation of the book of Jeremiah because they (individually and together) bear witness to both the complex historical development of Jeremianic tradition, and also the complexity of the reception and appropriation of the book of Jeremiah within post-biblical theological traditions, given the powerful message of the prophetic critique and the sanctity of the institution that Jeremiah seems to be challenging.<sup>5</sup> The field of Jeremiah studies may be understood (albeit with exceptions) to have followed a trajectory moving steadily away from an interpretative emphasis on the historical prophet and his ministry, initially toward a focus on compositional history (including redaction criticism, tradition history and inner-biblical exegesis) and, more recently, toward considerations of the hermeneutical dialectic between the biblical text itself and the contextual location and interests of interpreters.<sup>6</sup> The present study seeks to explore

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implications throughout the process. As will become clear in what follows, I am inclined instead towards an approach that envisages a dialectical or dialogical relationship between exegetical conclusions and hermeneutical-methodological frameworks.

<sup>5</sup> For a useful collection of essays and responses that bring together a focus on the compositional history and development of the book of Jeremiah and its reception and effective-history, see the recently published Najman and Schmid, eds., *Jeremiah's Scriptures*.

<sup>6</sup> The numerous volumes stemming from the SBL program unit "Writing/Reading Jeremiah" provide a useful overview of this trajectory. Bearing in mind their North American context of origin, these collections arguably make an effort to include British and Continental European perspectives as well. See Diamond and Stulman, eds., *Jeremiah (Dis)placed*, Maier and Sharp, eds., *Prophecy and Power*, Holt and Sharp, eds., *Jeremiah Invented*, especially the introductions to each volume. Edited volumes detailing some of the earlier stages of the trajectory within the twentieth century include: Perdue et al, eds., *Prophet to the Nations*, Diamond et al., eds.,

the potential connections between the role of traditions behind the text and traditions in front of the text, suggesting that the embodied location of theologically-oriented interpreters within Jewish and Christian traditions constitutes a significant interpretative resource rather than merely a potential liability.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Textual Focus: Why the Temple Sermon?*

What I will periodically refer to as the temple sermon *proper* may be understood as the prophetic discourse of Jeremiah 7:1–15.<sup>8</sup> Set within the context of what is usually regarded as the first half of the major division of the book (chaps. 1–25), this text presents a message that the prophet Jeremiah has been given and instructed to deliver with the Jerusalem temple as both his setting and his major theme. Following a brief, formulaic introduction (7:1) and an account of YHWH's instructions to Jeremiah (v. 2), the passage consists mainly of the speech or sermon itself, calling on the people of Judah to amend their ways and warning of the consequences of divine judgment, should they fail to do so (vv. 3–15). This text has frequently been regarded not only as the initial instance of the so-called prose sermons that are found throughout the book, but also as paradigmatic with regard to the literary style and ideological agenda (i.e. Deuteronomistic) of this material.<sup>9</sup>

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*Troubling Jeremiah*, Curtis and Römer, eds., *Jeremiah and its Reception*, and Bogaert, ed., *Le Livre de Jérémie*.

<sup>7</sup> In a recent guide to the critical study of the book of Jeremiah, Mary Mills groups her discussion of religious/theological approaches alongside other contextual approaches as a way of illustrating the most recent interpretative emphases on dynamics 'in front of the text' being brought to bear on interpretation of the book (see Mills, *Jeremiah: Prophecy in a Time of Crisis*). I suggest that, much like other contextual forms of interpretation, the location of the theologically-oriented interpreter might allow her to potentially 'see' and 'hear' what might easily be missed by interpreters situated in other contexts, operating with various other interests and concerns.

<sup>8</sup> There is, of course, argument about both the extent of the passage and the appropriateness of the label "temple sermon." For example, Lundbom judges it to be a "misnomer," that is "best abandoned" given his preferred structural account of three independent oracles (vv. 3–7, 8–11, 12–15) that have been joined together (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 455–459, here 458).

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Stulman, *Prose Sermons*, and, more recently, Leuchter, "Medium and Message." Weippert (*Prosareden*, 228–229) dissents from the majority view, claiming that the prose sermons do not display evidence of Deuteronomistic redaction but rather reflect the common rhetorical prose style (*Kuntsprosa*) of Jeremiah's context. Cf. Bright, "Date of Prose Sermons," Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 64–65.



The temple sermon *revisited* (Jer. 26:1–24) constitutes the opening narrative of the second main half of the book (chaps. 26–52), and it focuses less directly upon the words of the prophet and more upon the reception of his message within his community, including various conflicting reactions and responses. Set early within the reign of King Jehoiakim (26:1), this text appears to present a summary of some of the key features of the earlier sermon (vv. 2–6) followed by an initially hostile reaction from the religious leaders, which in turn provokes the interest of the political sphere (vv. 7–15). As the palace officials attempt to diffuse the situation, local elders speak up on behalf of Jeremiah as well, and the narrative concludes with the recitation of two analogous situations involving the potential silencing of the prophetic voice by the monarchy as we are told that Jeremiah himself narrowly escapes the imminent threat (vv. 16–24).

#### *A Case of Déjà vu?*

The conspicuous relationship between Jeremiah 7 and 26 has engendered a number of explanatory construals within critical scholarship.<sup>10</sup> These texts may be understood as two distinct accounts of the same historical event within the life of the prophet Jeremiah, the first portraying the sermon itself and the second providing a narrative contextualization and emphasizing the effect of the prophetic word. According to such a construal, both texts may be confidently dated on the basis of the setting indicated in 26:1.<sup>11</sup> For example, taking for granted the consensus of early twentieth-century source critics that chapters 7 and 26 represent two reports of the same event, Jack R. Lundbom claims, “The narrative [of chap. 26] should be taken as historical by and large...written soon after the events it reports took place.”<sup>12</sup> John Bright views the temple sermon as indicative of the theological conflict that the prophet was embroiled in throughout his

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<sup>10</sup> Influential discussions of these two chapters in relation to one another include: Reventlow, “Gattung und Überlieferung”; Carroll, *Chaos to Covenant*, 84–95; Holt, “Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon”; O’Connor, “Do Not Trim”; Seidl, “Jeremias Tempelrede.”

<sup>11</sup> See Nötscher, *Das Buch Jeremias*, 82–83; Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 223, 227.

Numerous scholars have argued that the phrase בראשית ממלכות יהויקים is a technical expression referring to the accession year of the king; Holladay (*Jeremiah* 2:103–104) and Bright (*Jeremiah*, 58; idem, *Covenant and Promise*, 163) date the event with astonishing precision to between September 609 and April 608, BCE.

<sup>12</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 21–36, 284–285. Hyatt (“Torah in the Book of Jeremiah,” 390) refers to Jer. 26:4–6 as a “brief report” of the “more complete account” given in chap. 7.

ministry, while Mark Leuchter suggests the event constituted “a pivotal moment in Jeremiah’s career.”<sup>13</sup> Other interpreters place a comparable emphasis upon the historicity of what these texts envisage, while calling into question the conclusion that they must be understood to reflect the same event. For example, R.E. Clements affirms that both passages convey what is “undoubtedly...essentially the same prophetic message,” and yet he avers, “It is certainly possible that Jeremiah returned to the theme on more than one occasion.”<sup>14</sup>

Acknowledging such exceptions, it remains the case that the vast majority of interpreters understand Jer. 7:1–15 and 26:1–24 to be two accounts of the same occasion, whether this is understood as an historical event to which the text bears witness, or else primarily as a feature of the narrative world of the text.<sup>15</sup> An alternative to the “historiographical approach” represented above is found in redaction-critical proposals that seek to establish the ways and the extent to which authors and editors have shaped the contents of chapters 7 and 26 with corresponding language and motifs.<sup>16</sup> In the vein of this latter construal, many interpreters focus attention upon the literary and theological relationship between the two texts, a relationship that may be

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<sup>13</sup> See, respectively, Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, p. 142 and Leuchter, *Josiah’s Reform*, 111–112. Leuchter’s comment here refers specifically to Jer. 7:1–15; in a subsequent monograph (Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 25–38), he argues that that chap. 26 involves a deliberate citation of chap. 7 in support of a particular scribal agenda. See further below.

<sup>14</sup> Clements, *Jeremiah*, 154. Similarly, Keil and Delitzsch (“Jeremiah and Lamentations,” 241–242) understand chapter 26 to be a narrative construal of a separate temple oracle from the one recorded in chapter 7 while maintaining an emphasis on situating the event within the life of the prophet. Although they acknowledge that 26:2–6 *appears* to be essentially a reprisal of the message of 7:1–15, these commentators note that “it is a peculiarity of Jeremiah frequently to repeat certain of the main thoughts of his message,” and they distinguish between the emphasis on the destruction of the temple and the exile of the people in chap. 7 and the destruction of the city as well in chap. 26.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Rudolph (*Jeremia*, 52, my trans.) explains: “That 7:1–15 is the speech summarized in chap. 26 (cf. 7:2 with 26:2), cannot be doubted (cf. Ellison 1961, 222); Jer demands amendment (7:3–5=26:3–13) and threatens the fate of Shiloh in 7:12–14=26:6. While chap. 26 gives the narrative of the speech and its consequences, chap. 7 provides only the speech itself.” Yet he is not committed to tracing the texts back to the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet: “One must either assume that the words of Jer have been subsequently revised and sermonically extended (so Volz), or else that genuine words of Jer here have gone through an external interpretation.”

<sup>16</sup> This terminology comes from McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:681–682. He cites Holt, Peake, Cornill and Thiel as advocates of this approach, and offers an extended critique of Weippert’s work.

framed with reference to the structure of the book of Jeremiah, the influence of ideologically-motivated editorial development, or else elements of both.<sup>17</sup>

Ernest W. Nicholson resists what he regards as a “superficial reading” of chapter 26 which would suggest that it represents “a particular incident in the life of the prophet or the suffering he endured.”<sup>18</sup> Instead, on the basis of the divine purpose statement for the oracle in 26:3 and the observation of structural parallels between chapters 26 and 36, Nicholson argues that chap. 26 represents an “edifying story” for which Deuteronomistic editors are responsible.<sup>19</sup> The chapter is therefore understood to fit well with Nicholson’s overall thesis of a comprehensive Deuteronomistic redaction of the book of Jeremiah, exhibiting a clear exilic provenance and paraenetic purpose.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Theodor Seidl eschews what he regards as the “superficial historical judgment” (*vordergründige historische Urteil*) that chapter 7 constitutes clear evidence of the opposition of the historical prophet Jeremiah to the Josianic reform, arguing instead that this text is “ein gänzlich deuteronomistische Komposition, die mit Jer 26 in der Deutung der politischen Katastrophe und der Rechtfertigung Jahwes konvergiert.”<sup>21</sup> In Seidl’s view, this multi-layered Deuteronomistic text adopts the character (*Zeichen*) of Jeremiah in order to address the theological questions of the exilic generation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> According to Scalise (in *Jeremiah 26–52*, 6), “The distinctive reference to Shiloh in v 6 cues the reader to recognize vv. 4–6 as an abridgment and interpretation of the Temple Sermon of 7:1–15.” Subsequently, Scalise offers more nuance, referring to ch. 26 as, “an interpretive narrative contextualization of the longer sermon in the earlier chapter” (15), yet her treatment remains representative of the view that the relationship between the chapters is one of literary dependence. cf. O’Connor, “Do Not Trim,” 620. Holt (“Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon”) sees thematic parallels as evidence of Deuteronomistic redaction.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles*, 52–53. Cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 515.

<sup>20</sup> The recognition of the apparently Deuteronomistic character of the prose material goes back to Duhm and Mowinckel. For overviews of the hypothesis of a Deuteronomistic redaction of the book of Jeremiah more generally, see Cazelles, “Jeremiah and Deuteronomy,” Hyatt, “Jeremiah and Deuteronomy,” Thiel’s two volumes on *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25* (1973) and 26–45 (1981); For a recent analysis of the literary relationships between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, see Mastnjak, *Deuteronomy and Emergence*. On the specific question of the temple sermon(s) as Deuteronomistic, see Holt, “Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon,” and Leuchter, “Medium and Message.”

<sup>21</sup> Seidl, “Jeremias Tempelrede,” 141, 175.

<sup>22</sup> Seidl, “Jeremias Tempelrede,” 175: “...Jer 7 ist...eine nachjeremianische exilische Redekomposition, die im Zeichen Jeremias theologische Fragen der Exilsgeneration abhandelt.”

Carolyn J. Sharp frames her own position as a mediating one between what she regards as overconfident theories about an historical Jeremiah and compositional theories of a sweeping, monolithic Deuteronomistic redaction being applied to earlier Jeremianic traditions.<sup>23</sup> She argues that both Jer. 7 and 26 (along with other chapters in the book) display multivocal layers of Deutero-Jeremianic prose which, when analyzed closely, reveal evidence of "...the focused and urgent clashing of two titanic ideologies," during the aftermath of the initial Judahite deportation in 597 BCE.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, Sharp is highly critical of a certain form of historical speculation, asserting, "Whether Jeremiah in fact preached a Temple Sermon is not recoverable to us, nor is it relevant to the exegetical question of the theological and ideological function of these chapters."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, however, Sharp's own speculative reconstruction of two ideologically-motivated political groups, based on the putative evidence of their clashing perspectives having been retained in the canonical form of the texts, may be just as guilty of preoccupation with matters "not recoverable to us" as the more ostensibly historically-oriented approaches that she critiques.

*An Alternative Focus: The Literary and Theological Relationship*

Each of the various positions sketched above has a degree of plausibility to it, yet the historical and compositional relationship between Jer. 7 and 26 remains opaque. It is not entirely unlikely that a prophet such as Jeremiah, in his particular historical context, would have preached the kind of message found in chapters 7 and 26 more than once; yet it is also conceivable that the overlap in language and thematic material might indicate two portrayals of one historical event. Moreover, the considerable

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<sup>23</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, xvi. Sharp adopts Stipp's category of "Deutero-Jeremianic prose" (see, e.g. Stipp, *deuterojeremianische Konkordanz* and idem, "Probleme des redaktionsgeschichtlichen Modells"), which introduces a significant level of nuance into the debate about the nature and extent of Deuteronomistic influence upon the book of Jeremiah. Cf. Maier, "Nature of Deutero-Jeremianic Texts," 105-106, and Römer, "Deuteronomistic Character," 124).

<sup>25</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 54. While sounding the note of epistemic modesty with regard to the historicity of the temple oracle is to be appreciated, the author's rhetoric is perhaps too strong when she claims that such historical questions are irrelevant. The fact that historicity cannot be conclusively established or denied does not render one's assumptions or convictions on this front *irrelevant* to her overall interpretation, even if it is more directly focused upon theological and ideological questions.

evidence indicating that the Jeremianic traditions underwent a long history of compositional development in the course of evolving into what would become the book's canonical form suggests that the similarities between the two accounts of the temple sermon might best be understood as the result of interpretative and editorial activity. It seems highly unlikely that any of these options may be proven conclusively, and equally unlikely that any may be conclusively refuted. Somewhat apart from the questions of a possible historical event to which both chapters are related, or the extent to which their growth has been influenced by a Deuteronomistic (or multivocal Deutero-Jeremianic) redaction, it is clear that a literary and theological relationship exists between chapters 7 and 26 in their canonical form, and it is this observation that will serve as the basis for the present study.<sup>26</sup> Whether or not it is possible to establish conclusively a historical event that stands behind the text or the precise contours of its compositional history, there are enough parallels and linkages between the two chapters to warrant close attention to their relationship in the context of the book of Jeremiah as a coherent literary and theological entity.

For example, Leslie C. Allen recognizes the tendency to read chap. 26 as a parallel version of the temple sermon in 7:1–15 to be based on a legitimate series of linguistic and thematic correspondences, and yet he finds the presence of “prose sermonic language” in both chapters to be a more significant and noteworthy feature of their relationship than their possible relationship to a historical event.<sup>27</sup> He draws these two chapters into conversation with Jer. 18 as well, arguing that in the oracle of 26:4–6, “Apart from the use of general prose sermonic terms, there is a particular dependence on the diction of the prose sermons in chs. 7 and 18.”<sup>28</sup> Allen's focus upon the relationship between the narrative portrayals of the temple sermon(s) of Jeremiah shares with the redaction-critical proposals a movement away from a preoccupation with the episode's historicity, but then stops short of attempting to establish precisely

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<sup>26</sup> A similar approach is taken by Stulman (*Jeremiah*, 235–236), who argues, “Jeremiah 26 is not merely an isolated text or an elaboration of Jer 7. Moreover, it is more than a prefix to the collection on true and false prophets in Jer 27–29. When reading the text holistically, one discovers that Jer 26 plays a strategic role in the overall architecture of the book.”

<sup>27</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, 295–296.

<sup>28</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, 297–298.

what historical group and which theological or ideological perspective is responsible for shaping the accounts in parallel ways.

Likewise, the present study will seek to understand the two accounts of the temple sermon in Jer. 7 and 26, and their relationship to one another, within the context of the canonical text of the Old Testament, as received within the Protestant tradition.<sup>29</sup> This should not be understood merely as an arbitrary preference for a synchronic approach over against a critical recognition of the evidence of diachronic complexity within the biblical text; indeed, part of the aim of this study is to challenge such a dichotomy by articulating a theologically-oriented interpretation of each passage that also does justice to the tensions in the text that may arise, in part, from its complex history of compositional development.<sup>30</sup> While it may be appropriate to call such an approach *synchronic*, given its deliberate construal of the text in its canonical (MT) form, it would be a mistake to imagine that this necessarily pits it squarely against diachronic approaches; rather, I will seek to take seriously the apparent results of diachronic processes while maintaining a clear focus on understanding the extant text in this particular form and engaging its subject matter from a theological perspective.<sup>31</sup>

### ***History of Scholarship: Jer. 7:1–15 and 26:1–24***

In this section, I explore in more detail some of the representative treatments of these two Jeremianic passages and their relationship to one another. I focus on scholars who have interpreted both texts in relation to one another, whereas treatments that focus primarily upon one or the other passage will be engaged in subsequent chapters. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate both the way in which I am building upon the work of other scholars and also those elements of a critical and theological approach to

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<sup>29</sup> Thus, the focus will be on the MT. I put it this way so as to avoid the sense of an arbitrary privileging of this text-form; rather it is a decision that stems from the role that my contextual and confessional location as an interpreter plays within my approach to biblical criticism. On the theological rationale for privileging the MT for the purpose of theological interpretation see Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture*, 14-15, 44-46.

<sup>30</sup> I contend that it is possible to do justice to the elements of tension and diversity that signal complex diachronic processes without necessarily engaging in the debate regarding specific hypotheses about redactional layers and the putative historical agents or processes responsible for them.

<sup>31</sup> Chapman (*1 Samuel as Christian Scripture*) adopts a similar approach, seeking both to do justice to the critical interpretative issues that are relevant to his study while maintaining a clear focus on “what [this] biblical book is centrally *about*” (p. 2, emphasis original; cf. 28-30).

these texts that I regard as worthy of further attention or development. In some cases, this latter dynamic will take the form of a critique, in order to pave the way for alternative approaches and divergent conclusions within the course of my own reading of the biblical texts.

*Else K. Holt*

In her 1986 essay, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists," Else K. Holt argues that Jeremiah 7 and 26 constitute "two different accounts of the same event, each with its own purpose," and that both reflect the concerns and motivational interests of Deuteronomistic redactors.<sup>32</sup> She regards the compositional framework of the book of Jeremiah to be indicative of the ideology of the Deuteronomistic school, and goes on to claim that the detailed examination of particular sections of the book "clearly indicate Deuteronomistic activity" in a way that the compositional pattern perhaps only suggests or hints at.<sup>33</sup> The two accounts of the temple sermon are understood to reflect more explicitly the correspondence between the theology of the book of Jeremiah and that of the Deuteronomists by articulating a form of theodicy with regard to the crisis of exile, yet also communicating a message of future hope in the wake of that disaster.<sup>34</sup>

In her interpretation of Jeremiah 7, Holt argues that the punishment envisioned by the temple sermon is directed at the people's failure to keep Torah and their failure to relate the worship in the temple to everyday life, rather than their complacent faith

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<sup>32</sup> Holt, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," 85. She clearly overstates when she claims that this way of viewing the basic relationship between the two chapters is "universally accepted" among OT scholars (74).

<sup>33</sup> Holt, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," 73. The author builds upon what she regards as two of the most important works that had explored the theory of dtr editing of the book of Jeremiah up to that point, namely the redaction-critical approach of W. Thiel and the traditio-historical approach of E.W. Nicholson.

<sup>34</sup> Holt offers a re-evaluation of her own argument from the 1986 essay in Holt, "Temple Sermon Revisited" (2008). While she critiques and abandons her earlier confidence with regard to the historicity of the event to which chaps. 7 and 26 were understood to correspond, and articulates a view of Deuteronomistic influence that has been somewhat chastened by the growing perception of methodological problems associated with the notion of 'pan-deuteronomism' in biblical research, there are numerous elements of continuity in her views. For example, she continues to affirm a Deuteronomistic emphasis on theodicy as central to the purpose of chapter 26, which is the main focus of her latter essay.

in the temple.<sup>35</sup> Following Thiel's redaction-critical reconstruction, she claims that the conditional element of the prophetic discourse is entirely absent from the putative original oracle, such that "The condemnation in his words spoken in the Temple is absolute: there is no way to save the Temple."<sup>36</sup> She speculates that the prophet himself likely underwent a personal development from hope for the future to resignation and despair, especially as the Babylonian invasion came to seem more and more inevitable. She explains,

Because the existing political and military conditions were interpreted as expressions of Yahweh's punishment, total destruction must have seemed unavoidable. Whereas at an earlier point Jeremiah had cherished a hope that the people would repent and thereby appease Yahweh's anger, he now saw that such repentance had not occurred and that the situation called for teaching phrased in very absolute terms. To teach repentance would be meaningless. What had to be preached was the imminence of the hour of judgment.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Holt argues that, since it was no longer possible for Jeremiah to preach repentance, what remained for the prophet to do was to articulate theodicy, interpreting the imminent and irreversible dissolution of covenant relationship as fitting punishment for the sinfulness of the people and their abandonment of Torah.<sup>38</sup>

In her discussion of chapter 26 Holt is again indebted to a critical reconstruction of a putative original version of the material, here following the work of F.L. Hossfeld and I. Meyer.<sup>39</sup> According to Holt, "We must regard ch. 26 as an abbreviated summary of the oracle which exists in its complete form in ch. 7. We are not, however, dealing with a case of literary dependence, but with two mutually independent versions."<sup>40</sup> In

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<sup>35</sup> Holt, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," 75. She resists the view of Volz, McKane, and others that what the prophet criticizes is a "false sense of security," or a complacent faith in the temple itself.

<sup>36</sup> Holt, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," 75. See also pg. 74, where the author follows Thiel's reconstruction of an 'original' oracle, understood to consist of vv. 4, 9a, 10–12, and 14. Cf. Thiel, *deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25*, 114–116.

<sup>37</sup> Holt, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," 76. The author offers a similar reading of Jer. 3 in which she is convinced that again there is no hope of repentance; she also regards this shift from hope to despair as related to the prophet's positive view of Israel and negative view of Judah (see pp. 76–77).

<sup>38</sup> Holt, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," 77.

<sup>39</sup> See Hossfeld and Meyer, "Prophet vor dem Tribunal," esp. p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> Holt, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," 77. This could have been phrased in a slightly more precise way, as chap. 26 is not, in its entirety, an "abbreviated summary" of the temple sermon in chap. 7. Rather, it is vv. 4–6 that are usually understood to reflect a summation of the longer version of the sermon in 7:1–15.



her view, the elements of linguistic, formal, and thematic overlap that exist between the two accounts may be ascribed to the agency of the Deuteronomistic editors responsible for the inclusion of both; apart from these connections and the common subject of the prophet Jeremiah, “there is for all practical purposes no further coherence between the two chapters.”<sup>41</sup> Holt concludes that Jer. 7 and 26 should be understood as two distinct accounts of the same event, each shaped and included by Deuteronomistic editors for a distinct purpose. In chapter 7, the focus is on YHWH’s message to the people, and the redactors have supplemented an original message of judgment with a conditional dynamic and a concern with theodicy. In chapter 26, the focus is on the response of the people, and the chapter serves a structural and didactic purpose as an introduction to the second major section of the book.<sup>42</sup>

*Kathleen M. O’Connor*

In an essay primarily focused upon the purpose and function of chapter 26 within the book of Jeremiah, Kathleen M. O’Connor devotes considerable attention to the relationship between the two accounts of the temple sermon.<sup>43</sup> After surveying and highlighting weaknesses in a number of previous approaches to the purpose of chap. 26 and its relationship to 7:1–15, the author articulates her own view, arguing that “chap. 26 is a midrashic elaboration of chap. 7. It expands themes from chap. 7 and presents new themes in order to introduce the second ‘book’ of Jeremiah (chaps. 26–45), itself designed to meet the needs of the exilic community.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, in direct contrast to Holt’s denial of any relationship of direct literary dependence between the two accounts of Jeremiah’s temple sermon, O’Connor claims that chap. 26 should be

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<sup>41</sup> Holt, “Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon,” 78. In her assertion of “The deuteronomistic revision of the two chapters,” she follows primarily Thiel (*deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25*, 105–119) on chap. 7, and Hossfeld and Meyer (“Prophet vor dem Tribunal,” 41ff., 45ff.) on chap. 26.

<sup>42</sup> Holt, “Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon,” 81–85.

<sup>43</sup> O’Connor, “Do Not Trim.”

<sup>44</sup> O’Connor, “Do Not Trim,” 618. O’Connor uses the term “midrash” with reference to Michael Fishbane’s groundbreaking discussion of the re-appropriation of earlier biblical texts by later ones (see *Biblical Interpretation*, esp. pp. 543 and 241–245), explaining, “Fishbane prefers to use *traditum*, *traditio* to describe the elements in the process of inner-biblical exegesis, except ‘where earlier biblical sources are clearly present.’ That is exactly the case here” (618, n. 7). Caution might be warranted here, in the light of recent discussions by both Driver (*Brevard Childs*, 160–205) and Sommer (*Revelation & Authority*, 225) resisting uses of the term “midrash” that come close to merely equating the phenomenon with *interpretation* generally.

understood as a deliberate, interpretative re-appropriation of chap. 7 for a new audience and occasion.<sup>45</sup>

O'Connor eschews what she calls "biographical assumptions" about the relationship between the two accounts in favour of a view of Jer. 26 as a "theological expansion" and a "theological elaboration" of Jer. 7:1–15.<sup>46</sup> In her view, 26:1–6 features a process of "radically abridging" the original temple sermon, in which "the narrator eliminates from the chap. 7 version of the temple sermon what does not concern him, and he stresses what is of importance to him in the new circumstances of his community. The community must repent and listen to the entire Jeremianic message."<sup>47</sup> The remainder of chap. 26 is understood by O'Connor to develop into a formal court scene (vv. 7–16), followed by a series of confused and inconsistent redactional additions (vv. 17–24).<sup>48</sup> From vv. 7ff. the narrative "departs entirely from chap. 7 to relate a conflict story with the prophet at its center," and to emphasize the importance of the community's response in a new historical situation.<sup>49</sup>

According to O'Connor, "The primary purposes of chap. 26 are theological, political, and literary rather than historical or biographical."<sup>50</sup> She suggests that the "midrashic development" of Jer. 7:1–15 at the outset of the second major section of the

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<sup>45</sup> Oddly, O'Connor cites Holt as one of many scholars who accept some form of literary dependence between the two chapters ("Do Not Trim," 620, n. 10), despite Holt's explicit denial of such a relationship (see Holt, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," 77).

<sup>46</sup> O'Connor, "Do Not Trim," 620.

<sup>47</sup> O'Connor, "Do Not Trim," 620. According to O'Connor, certain elements are retained from chap. 7 but also undergo expansion or development in chap. 26: e.g. the theme of hearing/heeding YHWH and his prophets (7:13) in order to avoid punishment is present in 26:4–5; the threat of punishment that cites the precedent of Shiloh (7:14) is paralleled by 26:6, and the ambiguity of the term מקום from chap. 7 is used more explicitly to refer to both the temple and the city; she notes that the reference to *Torah* might be intended to call to mind 7:4–13, but that claims that even if so, the cultic emphases from chap. 7 are largely absent from chap. 26.

<sup>48</sup> See O'Connor, "Do Not Trim," 620–625.

<sup>49</sup> O'Connor, "Do Not Trim," 620. The author observes that the prophecy against the temple from vv. 6, 9 is absent in v. 11, and she suggests: "This modification in wording suggests that chap. 26 addresses a circumstance of the people where temple theology and practice are not major questions. The concern, instead, is on the fall of the capital city and the loss of land" (621).

<sup>50</sup> O'Connor, "Do Not Trim," 625. She expands further on pp. 627–630 with a series of "thematic connections" and "redactional purposes," including: a reiteration of the prophet's legitimacy; renewed emphasis on repentance; a symbolic introduction to the material in chapters 27–45; a focus on the crises faced by the exilic community, with a stress on the problem of leadership and the importance of a faithful response.

book functions to re-articulate and re-establish the prophetic authority of Jeremiah within a new generation and a new context.<sup>51</sup> She explains further, “The second book, or the second half of the Book of Jeremiah presents new messages of Jeremiah or, more precisely, further developments of the Jeremianic traditions to update them for new crises in the community.”<sup>52</sup>

*Mark Leuchter*

Unlike Holt and O’Connor, Mark Leuchter does not address the relationship between the two passages within one study, but rather offers an interpretation of Jer. 7:1–15 and then 26:1–24 within the context of successive monographs.<sup>53</sup> In *Josiah’s Reform and Jeremiah’s Scroll* (2006), Leuchter draws upon an earlier article in order to argue that the temple sermon in 7:1–15 is best understood within the context of “the dissonant voices and conflicting ideologies of late seventh-century Judah.”<sup>54</sup> In his view, this text “represents the pivotal moment in Jeremiah’s career,” because it marks the shift from his role as an advocate of the Josianic reform to a Mosaic prophet in his own right.<sup>55</sup> Focusing upon the use of the term מִקּוֹם, he suggests that the use of the same term in Deut. 17:8–13 is “the programmatic basis” for the way it is used here in Jeremiah.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> O’Connor, “Do Not Trim,” 627–628. “The midrashic development in the second half of the book is the reason that chap. 26 introduces Yahweh’s command not to ‘trim a word’ from his prophetic message. Like a beard, the Jeremianic tradition must not be trimmed but allowed to grow (see Jer 48:37 and Isa 15:2)” (627). She notes the dual command not to add or take away anything in Deut. 4:2 and 13:1, but notes that the prohibition against adding is not present here because that is precisely what the narrator is doing (628).

<sup>52</sup> O’Connor, “Do Not Trim,” 627.

<sup>53</sup> See Leuchter, “The Temple Sermon,” 111–125 in *Josiah’s Reform* (2006), and idem. “The Hermeneutics of Citation: Jeremiah 26,” 25–38 in *Polemics of Exile* (2008). The latter study most fully addresses the hermeneutical relationship between the two accounts.

<sup>54</sup> Leuchter, *Josiah’s Reform*, 111. Leuchter confidently ascribes the temple sermon to the historical prophet Jeremiah, rather than to Baruch or a later redactor (122–125). He is also fairly convinced that he can place the sermon in its historical context and identify the political issues that it supposedly addresses (125; cf. Leuchter, “The Temple Sermon,” 94).

<sup>55</sup> Leuchter, *Josiah’s Reform*, 111–112, cf. 125. Leuchter describes the temple sermon and its literary context as a polemical collection, “aimed at the institutions of Judah that compromised the spirit of Deuteronomistic ideology,” (111).

<sup>56</sup> Leuchter, *Josiah’s Reform*, 113, n. 7. Presumably, this judgment is made on the basis of drawing the connection between Jer. 7:1–15 and 26:1–24. If the latter text provides the historical context and more detail concerning the aftermath of the sermon articulated in the earlier one, then there are a number of apparent elements that overlap with the guidelines laid out in Deut. 17. In “The Temple Sermon,” 100–101, n. 26, he explains: “the narrative counterpart to the Temple Sermon, Jer. 26, is itself structured upon Deut. 17:8–13 as a response to its mandate and as an introduction to ideas that would crest in Jer. 36.”

According to Leuchter, both the terminology of ‘dwelling’ and ‘place’ in the temple sermon recall the function of the same technical terminology in Deuteronomy, but with important innovations having taken place.<sup>57</sup>

First, he points out that the “name” terminology that would be expected within a Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic context is absent from the conditional promise in vv. 3 and 7, on the basis of which observation he claims, “It is no longer Yahweh’s own name that he will cause to dwell in the Temple...The focus is on the people themselves rather than the architectural structure surrounding them.”<sup>58</sup> Second, Leuchter argues that although vv. 11–14 might appear to invoke the Deuteronomistic name theology, the latter part of the sermon is in fact levelling a critique against a population that has failed to fulfill its covenantal responsibilities while clinging to “obsolete systems” and “empty traditions.”<sup>59</sup> He maintains that the prophet does not critique the temple itself nor even the Deuteronomistic name theology, but rather the elevation of cultic systems and theological traditions over the obligations of Torah.<sup>60</sup>

In *The Polemics of Exile* (2008) Leuchter turns his attention to Jeremiah 26–45, opening his second monograph with a discussion of the hermeneutical relationship between chapters 7 and 26.<sup>61</sup> In the first chapter of this volume, he argues that the

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<sup>57</sup> In his earlier article (“The Temple Sermon,” 93), Leuchter argued that the temple sermon uses מקום as a technical term in a way that alters its function, moving from its earlier ‘special significance’ to a more deuteronomistically-oriented purpose. The result of this shift is that “the sacral nature of the term מקום is retained, as is the spirit of deuteronomistic ideology, but the privileged status of Jerusalem and the Temple is eliminated.”

<sup>58</sup> Leuchter, *Josiah’s Reform*, 113.

<sup>59</sup> Leuchter, *Josiah’s Reform*, 117–122. Leuchter claims that the passive sense of the Niphal form of קרא “distances Yahweh from the act of linking the divine name to the Temple, implying instead that in the wake of Josiah’s death, this is no longer a divine initiative but a human-born conceit” (117), and he claims that this form of the verb suggests a link between 1 Kgs. 8:43 and 2 Sam. 6:2. He then claims that the same “tone” of the “Solomonic form” of this expression is evident in v. 14, thus continuing to “[diminish] the value of the Deuteronomistic name theology” (122).

<sup>60</sup> While he does not discuss the notion of inviolability as such, he clearly operates with a similar concept of the purpose of the sermon in relation to the temple and Zion traditions (see footnotes 10, 18 and 31).

<sup>61</sup> These two volumes may be understood as two parts of the same project, as both attempt to reconstruct not only the compositional history of the book but also the complexities of scribal conflicts that contributed to its growth and development. Yet, it might also be worth noting that the weight of the former monograph is tilted more toward the historical prophet, and the latter more toward the composition of the book; in my view, this is largely because Leuchter is confident in dating so much material within the first half of the book to an historical Jeremiah,

purpose of Jeremiah 26 is to establish “the authority of the scribes as principal mediators of religious tradition during the exile, with the freedom and authority to interpret and adjust preexilic tradition.”<sup>62</sup> Leuchter understands 26:4–6 as a deliberate citation of the temple sermon in 7:1–15, a literary relationship that both indicates the centrality of that sermon to the message and career of Jeremiah and yet also interprets it within another context.<sup>63</sup> Yet he resists the construal of this latter text as a summary or a “loose recitation of an earlier tradition,” instead arguing that “The author has deliberately crafted a short piece to recall the Temple Sermon but also to use it as a platform for other important matters he wishes to address.”<sup>64</sup> These matters include YHWH’s Torah (v. 4), the prophetic tradition (v. 5), the destruction of Shiloh (v. 6), and the destruction of Jerusalem (v. 6). Although these last two subjects are clearly in view already in 7:1–15, Leuchter maintains that they are explicitly drawn out in this context in ways that were merely implicit in the former context.<sup>65</sup>

According to Leuchter, the author responsible for Jer. 26 generates something of a paradigm shift in the understanding of the prophetic message. This is accomplished, first of all, by placing an increased emphasis on דבר terminology (in contrast to קרא; compare 7:2 and 26:2) and thus “[allowing] the author’s exegesis to possess the

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whereas chaps. 26–45 are understood as the result of scribal engagement with Jeremiah traditions.

<sup>62</sup> Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 35. Thus, he suggests that the citation of 7:1–15 within the context of 26:1–24 initiates a message culminating in Jeremiah 36. Following Leuchter, O’Connor, and to some extent Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 509–514), I agree that there is much to gain from a consideration of the three chapters together, though chap. 36 is beyond the scope of the present argument.

<sup>63</sup> He explains, “...the author’s reliance upon the Temple Sermon tells us that it was already well known to his exilic audience and (given its contents) central to exilic consciousness” (25). It is interesting that he believes the narrative parallel is so obvious, and yet he admits that “much has changed,” in terms of language and ideas being altered, added, or muted (26). “Beyond the most general purpose and tone of the passage, the reference to Shiloh and its association with the Temple appear to be all that remains from the original Sermon” (26). If this is the case, then it seems that a case could be made for the parallel being not so obvious.

<sup>64</sup> Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 28.

<sup>65</sup> Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 28. He notes that the מקום terminology from the original temple sermon is absent here (cf. O’Connor, 620) and that the destruction of Jerusalem has implications related to foreign nations in this latter, presumably exilic context. In addition, with regard to the first two features, Leuchter stresses that while Deuteronomy is implied in 7:5–6, 9 and Jeremiah is implicitly regarded as standing within the prophetic tradition (e.g. 7:25), chapter 26, by contrast features more overt mentions of Torah and of fellow prophets within that tradition.

authority of Jeremiah's own words."<sup>66</sup> In addition, the citation of Micah 3:12 in Jer. 26:18 functions to further legitimize the claim to prophetic authority on the part of the scribes by establishing continuity between the temple sermon and a legitimate prophet from the past.<sup>67</sup> For Leuchter, the episode concerning Uriah, far from a mere supplement or redactional accretion, is central to this hermeneutical dynamic. He explains,

The citation of the Uriah episode in this manner constructs a singular prophetic word spoken by Jeremiah, Micah, and Uriah. All three prophets addressed the fall of Jerusalem as filtered through their own experiences and backgrounds. The resulting message, effectively constructed by the author of the chapter himself, is that the prophetic tradition converges on the issue of Jerusalem's special sanctity and uniformly denies its legitimacy.<sup>68</sup>

### *Evaluation*

The three approaches considered here share an interest in the literary relationship between the two accounts of the temple sermon, and in how an analysis of this relationship might shed light on the purpose of both texts within the book of Jeremiah. Holt's essay nicely illustrates many of the features of both Jer. 7 and 26 that appear to signal Deuteronomistic influence, and she problematizes the common view that the message of the temple sermon should be primarily understood as a critique of the people's misplaced faith in the Jerusalem sanctuary. However, her attempt to account for the conditional element within the temple sermon by positing a change in the prophet's perspective regarding the possibility of repentance depends on a confidence in one's ability to reconstruct historical processes behind the text that even she herself no longer holds.<sup>69</sup> In the light of both the weaknesses of her earlier article and her more

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<sup>66</sup> Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 27. Having already drawn attention to the chapter's lack of focus on Jeremiah himself, Leuchter suggests that the author's words "hermeneutically...become Jeremiah's words. The author of Jeremiah 26 is thus able to rework his source material without compromising its theological force" (27). He later makes the questionable claim that by broadening the scope of what he cites from קרא to דבר the author has "fused" all these different elements into his message...and thus he asserts that "this matter" in Jer. 26:1 refers actually to all of chaps 1–25 – the entire tradition of the prophet's preexilic oracles (30).

<sup>67</sup> Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 32–33.

<sup>68</sup> Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 36.

<sup>69</sup> Again, see Holt, "Temple Sermon Revisited." Citing the influence of Robert Carroll, and discussing Sharp's *Prophecy and Ideology*, Holt expresses in this latter publication far less confidence in the possibility of establishing either a core oracle or an historical event to which these texts correspond.

recent willingness to adapt her views, it is worth exploring whether there might be something more to the accounts of the temple sermon than a Deuteronomistic concern with theodicy and a portrayal of Jeremiah's trial.

O'Connor and Leuchter each reflect a shift in emphasis, away from questions of an *event* in the life of the prophet, distinct literary sources to which each account might be ascribed to, and a monolithic account of Deuteronomistic influence towards what are arguably more nuanced discussions of the hermeneutical relationship between the two chapters.<sup>70</sup> However, a considerable emphasis on speculative reconstruction remains prominent in each, whether the focus is on the life of the prophet or the compositional history of the book.<sup>71</sup> The present study builds upon many of their insights, not least when it comes to construing Jer. 26 as in some way interpreting Jer. 7:1–15 within the context of the developing Jeremiah tradition. Yet I also propose a distinct hermeneutical framework for the interpretation of both accounts of the temple sermon and their relationship to one another. Based upon the preceding discussion, a number of preliminary conclusions may be articulated, which will lead into a more explicit orientation to the hermeneutical approach adopted in the present study: (1) whether or not one can establish with any degree of confidence the historicity of an event to which the temple sermon bears witness, or the precise identities and motivations of those involved in its compositional history and development, enough linguistic and thematic parallels exist to postulate a literary and hermeneutical relationship between the two texts; (2) while there are, no doubt, tensions and perhaps also evidence of diverse perspectives within both texts, the present study will test and explore the hypothesis that a theologically-oriented interpretation of the canonical (MT) text is capable of doing justice to these elements while maintaining a focus on the text itself, in its present form, and its theological subject matter;<sup>72</sup> (3) in contrast to those approaches that seek to identify the so-called *ipsissima verba* of the prophet, or to peel

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<sup>70</sup> On which trajectory, see especially Carroll, *Chaos to Covenant*, 5-30.

<sup>71</sup> By no means do I discount the value or legitimacy of historical reconstruction as an element of critical biblical interpretation; however, part of the purpose of this study is to challenge the assumption that reconstructed conflicts behind the text provide the best or only viable explanation for the phenomenon of compositional development.

<sup>72</sup> In chapter two I will explore weaknesses and alternatives to two specific proposals that emphasize conflict between traditions.

apart various layers of redactional development, revealing the contours of Judah's socio-political tensions during the exilic and post-exilic ages, or to determine the nature of a conflict between theological traditions behind the text, my focus will be upon what I take to be the theological subject matter of these texts, and their hermeneutical relationship to one another within the book of Jeremiah. I propose that the movement from a focus on prophet and/or book to a focus on the development of the Jeremianic tradition, may be extended with a consideration of the nature of tradition in an explicitly theological perspective.

### *The Jeremianic Tradition: Behind the Text*

Scholars of the Old Testament sometimes adopt a view of their discipline that features a problematic dichotomy between so-called *synchronic* and *diachronic* approaches. While these terms are not necessarily problematic and may simply be used descriptively to signal the focus of a given approach, they can also carry pejorative connotations and contribute to intense methodological debate. For example, one might be dismissive of a synchronic approach due to the assumption that it involves an illegitimate attempt to find unity where there is evidence of tension and diversity; conversely, one might be dismissive of a diachronic approach due to the assumption that it results merely in fragmentary analysis and speculative reconstructions. I suggest that such assumptions contribute to an unhelpful framework within the discipline of OT studies, and that a preferable alternative is to recognize that any number of various methodological and hermeneutical proposals *might* be capable of doing justice both to synchronic and diachronic concerns.

Such a nuanced approach is perhaps especially apposite within Jeremiah studies, given that the book features among the most complex within the OT with regard to textual and compositional history, and yet also constitutes a literary and theological *tour-de-force* in its canonical form, as evidenced by its reception in Jewish and Christian tradition, as well as in Western culture. The purpose of this section is to suggest the possibility of such an approach within the context of Jeremiah studies, and then to propose my own specific hermeneutical framework for the two accounts of the temple sermon. First, I provide a brief orientation to the significant evidence of tension, diversity and complexity within the compositional history of the book of Jeremiah;



then I will propose that an emphasis on the nature, contours, and development of *tradition* offers a plausible approach that has the potential to do justice both to the complexity of the text and its diachronic development and to the biblical texts and their relationship to one another in their canonical form and context.

### *The Text of the Book of Jeremiah*

The complexity of the “textual situation” of the book of Jeremiah has long been recognized, especially in light of the striking differences between the text-forms represented by the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Old Greek version (OG/LXX).<sup>73</sup> As is well-known, Septuagint Jeremiah is both considerably shorter in length than the Masoretic edition and features a structure that differs significantly in the latter half of the book.<sup>74</sup> Many scholars have argued that such a drastic divergence in text-forms is not best explained by common phenomena related to textual transmission, but instead most probably reflects the development of two distinct versions of the book from a relatively early stage.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, even before the watershed of the Qumran discoveries, the relationship between the extant versions had given rise to the theory of a distinct Hebrew *Vorlage* that the Old Greek translation bore witness to; apparent confirmation of this line of reasoning was then supplied with the discovery of fragments among the Dead Sea Scrolls that correspond to the Old Greek (4QJer<sup>b,d</sup>), alongside those that

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<sup>73</sup> This phrase comes from the title of Richard D. Weis’s essay “The Textual Situation of the Book of Jeremiah,” which offers a useful introduction to the contours of the text-critical discussion and the major scholarly perspectives in play. Reimer (*Oracles Against Babylon*, 108) and Shead (*The Open Book*, 15) each note that as early as the work of Origen and of Jerome, biblical scholars were observing and reflecting upon the striking divergence between the Greek and Hebrew versions of the book.

<sup>74</sup> Many scholars have noted that LXX Jer is 1/7 shorter than MT Jer, on the basis of word counts (see, e.g. Tov, “Some Aspects,” 148; Weis, “Textual Situation,” 269). The older view, that it was 1/8 shorter, was corrected by the work of Y-J Min, cited in Soderlund, *Greek Text of Jeremiah*, 11; 253. The structural difference between the two versions is evident in the placement of the so-called Oracles against the Nations after Jer. 25:13 in LXX while they comprise chaps. 46–51 in MT. Moreover, this block of material itself manifests a different internal ordering within each version.

<sup>75</sup> Shead (*The Open Book*, 15) and Gesundheit (“Question of LXX Jeremiah,” 30) trace this theory back as far as J.G. Eichhorn (1777). Weis helpfully divides the text-critical scholarship on the book of Jeremiah into three ‘camps’, including those who explain the differences between the LXX *Vorlage* and MT as mainly the result of the process of textual transmission (Fischer, Janzen, Lundbom, Soderlund), those who argue that the situation is best explained entirely on the basis of editorial influence (Migsch and Stulman), and those who posit a blend of redactional intervention and the effects of the transmission process (here he includes himself, Aejmelaes, Tov and Shead).

reflect the same tradition as MT (4QJer<sup>a,c</sup> as well as 2QJer).<sup>76</sup> Thus, the extant textual witnesses, together with the contours of text-critical research on the book of Jeremiah, force the interpreter to take seriously the reality of complexity within the book's compositional development. However, the way in which these facts relate to the interpretation of the book remains a matter of discussion; in other words, precisely in what way a commitment to doing justice to elements of textual and compositional complexity will affect my theologically-oriented interpretation of Jeremiah's temple sermon remains to be seen.<sup>77</sup>

Alongside a number of small-scale differences that will be discussed within the exegetical sections below, the most significant ways in which the OG and MT versions of the two accounts of the temple sermon differ is in the introduction to 7:1–15 and in the literary context of 26:1–24. Whereas the initial account of the temple sermon proper in MT features a series of layered, formulaic introductions to the message that Jeremiah is instructed to deliver, the majority of 7:1–2 is a *minus* in the LXX account, which simply begins: ἀκούσατε λόγον κυρίου πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία, and then launches into the sermon itself. Chapter 26 MT is frequently understood to occupy a pivotal role in the book, in terms both of its structural and thematic significance. It has often been understood to function as a kind of 'hinge' that may be understood to draw elements of chaps. 1–25 to a close whilst introducing dynamics that will become central to chaps. 27–45.<sup>78</sup> The corresponding chapter in OG Jeremiah, chap. 33, follows the so-called oracles against/concerning the nations (LXX Jer. 26:1–28:64 [= MT 46:1–51:64] and

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<sup>76</sup> See Gesundheit, "Question of LXX Jeremiah." However, Gesundheit suggests that the argument for the priority of the Hebrew *Vorlage* of LXX does not rely primarily upon evidence from Qumran, instead involving systematic analysis of differences between LXX and MT, such as those carried out by Stulman, Becking, Bogaert, and Tov. See also recent overviews by Shead, "Jeremiah," Weis, "Textual History," and Fischer, "Septuagint."

<sup>77</sup> What it might look like to 'do justice' to such diachronic dimensions is not necessarily straightforward, and exploring what it might entail from the perspective of a theological hermeneutic is part of the purpose of this thesis as a whole. For now, I will simply note my in-principle conviction that it does not necessarily mean that every interpreter must engage in detailed text-critical discussion, but that one may instead recognize and incorporate the interpretative implications of the situation whilst focusing his or her interpretation on the canonical form of the text, either MT or LXX, or each in its own right.

<sup>78</sup> See Kessler, "Jeremiah Chapters 26–45," Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 235–236. For an alternative structural account, based upon the author's theory of the book's compositional history, see Lundbom's three-volume commentary in the *Anchor Yale Bible* series (1999–2004), esp. vol. 1: pp. 92–101.

initiates a concluding section of the book that is dominated primarily by narrative (LXX Jer. 33:1–52:34). Thus, although these passages are by no means among the most prominent to feature in discussions of the textual history of the book, they do bear clear evidence of the standard features of the textual situation and thus contribute to the sense of complexity in the history of compositional development to which the interpreter of Jeremiah must do justice.

### *The Compositional History of Jeremiah*

Closely related to the textual history of the book of Jeremiah is the evidence of its compositional development in terms of literary history, which has been a prominent feature of much redaction-critical and traditio-historical research.<sup>79</sup> From the innovative source-critical work of Bernard Duhm, and the detailed refinement of his observations by Sigmund Mowinckel, to theories of a comprehensive redaction in the work of J.P. Hyatt and Winfried Thiel, William McKane's "rolling corpus," and Konrad Schmid's complex delineation of multiple editorial layers, literary-critical scholarship provides further evidence of the complexity of the diachronic dimension that confronts the interpreter of the book of Jeremiah.<sup>80</sup> Many useful reviews of this literature have been produced in recent monographs; rather than covering the same ground here, I simply refer to the ongoing discussion as evidence of the likelihood of the book's complex compositional development, regardless of the merits and limitations of the many specific proposals that have been made.<sup>81</sup> As noted above, Else K. Holt suggested as of 1986 that the two most influential studies that had explored the theory of

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<sup>79</sup> The interrelationship, or blurred boundaries, between the methods of textual and redaction criticism, as well as the phenomena that they seek to analyze, has been increasingly noted in recent scholarship; bearing this in mind, it remains heuristically valuable to differentiate between them. The kinds of phenomena that are frequently appealed to as evidence of compositional, or redactional development include: doublets and apparent formulaic insertions (see Parke-Taylor, *Doublets*); the style and date of the Hebrew language in various sections (see Hornkohl, *Periodization*); and the likelihood of Deuteronomistic influence, both in terms of style and theological perspective (see Mastnjak, *Deuteronomy and Emergence*).

<sup>80</sup> See Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (1901); Mowinckel, *Komposition* (1914); Hyatt, "The Deuteronomic Edition," (1956); Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion* (x2; 1973, 1981); McKane, *Jeremiah* 1 (1986); Schmid, *Buchgestalten* (1996), see esp. his appendix on pp. 434-436.

<sup>81</sup> For useful surveys of scholarship focused on the compositional history of the book of Jeremiah see Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 1-26; Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 1-24. In the interests of efficiency and maintaining a clear focus, my own literature review/survey of scholarship above has focused primarily on contributions to the understanding of Jer. 7 and 26, and their relationship to one another.

Deuteronomistic editing of the book of Jeremiah up to that point and undergirded other similar efforts were the redaction-critical approach of Thiel and the tradition-historical approach of Nicholson. Carolyn J. Sharp explicitly describes her approach as a blend of redaction criticism, tradition history and ideological criticism, a methodological blend that results in a focus not only upon compositional history proper, but also the putative theological and political motivations contributing to it and the “tradents” or “traditionists” responsible for its development. These recent approaches illustrate how closely related redaction criticism and tradition history can become in their reconstruction of the scribal processes and theological dynamics that contribute to compositional development.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, central to the critical study of the book of Jeremiah is the awareness of a dynamic involving the development of *traditions* that stand behind the canonical text that is received as scripture by the Jewish and Christian faiths.<sup>83</sup> Compelling evidence of variegated textual traditions and editorial activity is highly suggestive of the influence and development of theological traditions behind the text. For some scholars, a recognition and delineation of these elements of diversity may be understood as “theologically generative” for a contemporary interpretative context.<sup>84</sup> In the present study I will endeavor to do justice to and take seriously the evidence of compositional development, while challenging the contention that giving primary attention to such diachronic elements represents the most fruitful approach to reading the book of Jeremiah from the perspective of a theological hermeneutic. Likewise, I will challenge the sometimes correlative assumption that synchronic approaches to the text are inherently deficient by virtue of their lack of explicit attention to such dynamics.

While the concept of *tradition* has been central to modern critical discussions in a number of ways, its significance has been articulated predominantly in the descriptive mode of historical reconstruction. In the light of the review of previous

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Wilson “Exegesis, Expansion, and Tradition-Making.”

<sup>83</sup> This remains true whether one regards the MT or the LXX as the authoritative canonical form.

<sup>84</sup> See Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 157-169. It is worth noticing the influence of Walter Brueggemann upon Sharp’s approach, not least when it comes to regarding the “multivocal” nature of scripture and the theological importance placed on preserving its “dialogical” character. See Brueggemann (Sharp, ed.), *Disruptive Grace*, and Brueggemann, with Sharp, *Living Countertestimony*.

studies above, I will now provide an orientation to the hermeneutical approach of the present study by suggesting the potential fruitfulness of connecting these elements of tradition and development behind the text to the dynamics of theological traditions that have canonized the text and continue to receive it as scripture. To anticipate, I will suggest that meaningful theological engagement with the text in its canonical form may be accomplished in a way that does justice to diachronic concerns and complexities, but without necessarily engaging in, or proposing, specific redaction-critical or traditio-historical hypotheses. In addition, I will argue that the sustained attention to the nature of traditions and development behind the text may be helpfully reframed in the light of philosophical and theological discourse on the nature of tradition itself.

### *Theological Interpretation: An Interdisciplinary and Dialogical Approach*

Theologically-oriented biblical interpretation may be construed in a number of different ways.<sup>85</sup> In this study I pursue an approach that frames it as *interdisciplinary* engagement between biblical criticism and theological discourse.<sup>86</sup> This is in contrast to, for example, frequent pejorative reference to theologically-oriented approaches as ‘confessional’, which can lead to an easy, *a priori* dismissal of its relevance or legitimacy as a mode of interpretation; yet it also resists the apparently more positive rhetoric of ‘reclaiming the Bible for the church’ which may be comparably problematic in its

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<sup>85</sup> Seldom, if ever, understood as a ‘method’ theological interpretation of scripture has recently been construed as an orientation (Watson, *Text Church and World*; Brown, “Theological Interpretation”), as a set of hermeneutical priorities (Fowl, *Engaging*, and idem., *Introduction*), as a form of recovery or *ressourcement* (Treier, *Introducing*), and as a form of biblical theology (cf. Childs, *Biblical Theology*). See also the helpful discussion in the *International Journal for Systematic Theology* 12.2 (2010), as well as the overall contribution of the *Journal of Theological Interpretation* from 2007 to the present.

<sup>86</sup> In this study I will use this term in a nuanced way, so two points should be made initially in order to clarify: (1) one might use the term *intra*-disciplinary instead, given that constructive theological discourse and critical biblical studies may be understood as two sub-disciplines within the broader theological curriculum, yet I have chosen to emphasize the extent to which these disciplines have often been regarded as separate; (2) I am under no illusion about the novelty of this kind of approach. Although it might take an inter- or intra- disciplinary shape in the present climate of theological discourse, a significant element of the justification for it stems from periods within the tradition in which the separation of these disciplines was either inconceivable (so, e.g., the Patristic and Medieval eras) or subjected to a considerable challenge/resistance (so, e.g., the *ressourcement* agenda of *La Nouvelle Théologie*).

implicit tone of rivalry, whether or not such a tone is intended.<sup>87</sup> As will become clear, it is both valuable and necessary to recognize elements of potential compatibility and incompatibility when it comes to the relationship between theologically-oriented approaches and conventional critical methods. While it is entirely appropriate to articulate one's hermeneutical starting point and/or priorities as being explicitly theological, it is prudent to avoid any implicit stance of rivalry with regard to what communities and interpretative traditions the biblical literature should belong.<sup>88</sup>

Within an approach that is construed as interdisciplinary, a scholar will almost inevitably give precedence to one discipline or another, either in terms of viewing it as a methodological starting point or as a hermeneutical priority, or perhaps both. In what follows, I will suggest that Benjamin Sommer's dialogical model for Jewish biblical theology seems to give a hermeneutical and methodological priority to source-critical reconstructions, and then he makes a case for the continuity between these and later Jewish tradition. In contrast, although Francis Watson advocates a comparable form of dialectical engagement between Christian theological discourse and biblical criticism, he gives hermeneutical priority to a theological orientation and a set of "core concerns."<sup>89</sup> In other words, he calls for a robustly theological account of the nature of scripture and its interpretation, not at all in a way that denies the significance of particular, concrete historical situations or tensions, and yet in a way that situates them within a theological context. Taking my cue from Watson (among others), I will pursue an interdisciplinary conversation between theological discourse and critical methods that does justice to historical and textual plurality and yet remains primarily theological in its purpose and orientation.

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<sup>87</sup> For the latter approach, see Braaten and Jenson, eds., *Reclaiming the Bible*.

<sup>88</sup> Another collection in which contributors frequently adopt a regrettably dismissive posture toward historical criticism is Bartholomew and Heath, eds., *A Manifesto*. For a critique and a helpful distinction between possible approaches to theological interpretation of the OT, see Moberly, "Second Naïveté" (forthcoming).

<sup>89</sup> This latter phrase comes from Watson's essay in the recently published *Festschrift* for John Webster (Watson, "Does Historical Criticism?"). Others who give a hermeneutical priority to an explicitly theological account of the nature of scripture within the Christian tradition include Webster himself (see *Dogmatic Sketch*) and Lewis Ayres (see "Word Answering Word") and, in a way that bears some similarity to Sommer's approach, Gary Anderson (*Christian Doctrine*).

In his recent book, *Revelation and Authority*, Benjamin D. Sommer engages in what he calls “dialogical biblical theology,” involving a “movement back and forth between disciplines” of biblical criticism and theological reflection.<sup>90</sup> He explains,

The major methodological goal of this book is to reconceive the Bible – and in particular, the Bible as understood by modern biblical critics – as a work of Jewish thought that should be placed in dialogue with medieval and modern works. Thus, this book contributes to what I call dialogical biblical theology, which compares, contextualizes, and contrasts the Bible with postbiblical Jewish tradition. Such a theology can recover biblical voices that were lost or obscured as a consequence of the way biblical books were edited in antiquity, and it places those voices in the longer trajectory of Jewish thought.<sup>91</sup>

On the one hand, he understands his project to “straddle” the disciplines of biblical studies and modern Jewish thought, and to address the two topics of divine revelation as it is portrayed in the literature of the Pentateuch and the concept of revelation as it is construed by two of the major thinkers within the Jewish theological tradition; on the other hand, he explains, “at a more fundamental level,” the book is concerned with one single topic that is indispensable to the entire trajectory of Jewish thought from the Jewish Bible to later interpretative tradition, suggesting a blurring of the conventional boundaries between disciplines, between methods, and ultimately between the very concepts of scripture and tradition.<sup>92</sup> In Sommer’s words, “One of the points I attempt to make...is that the boundaries that divide these fields are inappropriate – not only intellectually inappropriate but also religiously inappropriate. Both the P writers in the Pentateuch and Abraham Joshua Heschel produced works of Torah, and it is entirely right that a student of Torah will discuss them in a single sentence.”<sup>93</sup>

Conceiving of his work as one of both descriptive and constructive theology, Sommer argues that the tension between two very different understandings of the nature of revelation that is evident in the interplay between the sources of the

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<sup>90</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 5.

<sup>91</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 5. Cf. Sommer, ed., *Jewish Concepts*.

<sup>92</sup> This duality of topic and of discipline expressed here relates to the intentions set out in the preface, wherein the author communicates his hope “to demonstrate to my colleagues in the guild of biblical studies that sensitivity to the concerns of later religious thinkers enriches our understanding of the biblical texts themselves,” and “that interaction between biblical scholarship and theology will be fruitful for both” (Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, ix).

<sup>93</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 5.

Pentateuch is also manifest within later Jewish thought.<sup>94</sup> Alongside his exegetical and constructive thesis, Sommer engages in sustained hermeneutical reflection upon the relationship and tensions between what he calls “biblical criticism and religious exegesis,” and he suggests, “The most crucial differences between biblical critics and many theological interpreters of scripture occur not in the ways they read but in decisions they make before they begin reading at all.”<sup>95</sup> In his view, these tensions need not constitute an impasse, but rather there can be a constructive relationship between the disciplines. Therefore, rather than making a decisive choice between the alternatives of approaching scripture as an historical and textual artifact or as scripture that still speaks today, he resists the dichotomy itself, since for himself and others who both belong to this particular religious tradition and generally accept the discoveries of biblical scholarship, “it is inevitable that the Hebrew Bible must be read both as artifact and as scripture.”<sup>96</sup>

*Francis Watson on Theologically-Oriented Biblical Interpretation*

Another scholar who has consistently called for a form of theological interpretation of the Bible that is historically grounded and critically engaged whilst being unapologetically theological in its orientation is Francis Watson. Not unlike Sommer, but from a Protestant Christian perspective, Watson construes a theological approach to biblical interpretation as a form of “interdisciplinary engagement,” involving what he calls “renewed dialogue” between biblical scholarship and systematic theology.<sup>97</sup> In

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<sup>94</sup> Specifically, he claims that the participatory model of divine revelation, normally understood as a later development within Jewish tradition and especially associated with Heschel and Rosenzweig, is present alongside the stenographic model that is usually understood to be the one advocated within the Pentateuch.

<sup>95</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 10. Cf. Sommer, “The Source Critic.”

<sup>96</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 12. He continues, “Moreover, it will not do to read the Bible serially, sometimes as artifact and at other times as scripture. Such a choice would require one to partition oneself, so that one has a secular mind and a religious soul coexisting uneasily in a single body but not communicating with each other” (12-13). In contrast to such a “fragmented and defective” hermeneutic, Sommer invokes the holistic vision of receptivity to God envisioned in Deut. 6:5 and argues that “An intellectually honest person addressed by the Hebrew Bible today must read the Bible at once as artifact and as scripture” (13).

<sup>97</sup> Watson, *Text, Church and World*, vii. The language of ‘renewal’ here suggests the same point that I have made above, namely that this dialogue is not merely a reading strategy arising from contemporary hermeneutical reflection but also takes its cue from periods in the history of biblical interpretation in which the disciplinary boundaries were not what they became in the modern period.



his influential monograph, *Text, Church and World*, Watson argues that a theological hermeneutic for biblical interpretation is not merely a reading strategy that happens to be located within a theological context or a guided by theological interests in the abstract, but a mode of interpretation that is theological *because* it “relate[s] to a distinct discipline – that of ‘systematic theology’ or ‘Christian doctrine’.”<sup>98</sup> He notes the irony that although it has become quite common for biblical scholars to engage in interdisciplinary forms of interpretation, necessitating that they acquire competence in another discipline, and despite the reality that many biblical critics do have theological interests that relate in one way or another to their work, the form of theologically-oriented biblical interpretation that he is advocating remains abnormal, if not intentionally avoided. He explains,

Despite the common ground they might be presumed to share, the relation between biblical studies and theology is widely held to be problematic. Although theologians often draw upon the work of biblical scholars and biblical scholars sometimes relate their work to particular theological trends, sustained interdisciplinary work between the two fields is surprisingly rare.<sup>99</sup>

Having argued that “To engage in a quest for a theological hermeneutic for biblical studies entails an interdisciplinary approach which brings biblical studies and systematic theology into dialogue with one another,” the author goes on to sketch some of the possible dangers that might accompany such a quest.<sup>100</sup> After noting the inadequacies of interdisciplinary approaches that fail to acquire sufficient competence in *both* disciplines, as well as those that simply shift *from* an interest in one *to* a focus on the other, Watson confronts the possibility that the two disciplines may simply prove to be incompatible.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, his account of the particular ideological commitments

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<sup>98</sup> Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 1.

<sup>99</sup> Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 12. Watson suggests that the reasons for this apparently odd state of affairs are closely related to the ideological commitments that have come to undergird historical biblical research in the secular context of academia. In the first place, the mode of biblical interpretation dominant within the modern university oriented primarily toward “the disinterested pursuit of truth,” and thus, within the context of “[a] commitment to academic secularity...[t]he church is represented as a threat to the quest for truth, and the idea that academic scholarship should aim to serve its proclamation is resisted” (7). In addition, he contends that “the historical-critical paradigm seems to condition its practitioners to believe that the biblical texts are unable to bear very much theological weight. (They are, after all, simply fragile remnants of historical circumstances quite different from our own)” (13).

<sup>100</sup> Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 12.

<sup>101</sup> Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 12.

suggests that although it may prove fruitful to pursue the dialogue between theology and biblical studies that he proposes, the potential for conflict at the level of hermeneutical priorities will represent a consistent potential.<sup>102</sup> In other words, it is too simple *either* to claim that explicitly theological and more conventional modes of biblical interpretation are compatible in a straightforward sense, *or* that they are locked in inevitable conflict and thus one must choose between them or else compartmentalize one's academic and personal engagement with biblical literature; rather the question of potential compatibility will need to be explored on a case-by-case basis, paying close attention to the nuanced interplay between particular exegetical insights and conclusions, on the one hand, and one's hermeneutical orientation and priorities on the other.

Both Sommer and Watson use *interdisciplinary* and *dialogical* terminology to advocate a mode of biblical interpretation that not only seeks to bring theology and biblical criticism into dynamic conversation in a contemporary context, but also derives its legitimacy, in part, from the organic relationship that each scholar identifies between biblical literature and theological reflection within their respective religious traditions. Each scholar operates as both a competent, professional exegete, paying careful attention to literary and historical detail, and also as a rigorous and creative theological thinker, grounded in the key texts and figures that have shaped their respective traditions. Moreover, both Sommer and Watson are deeply concerned to do justice to the plurality and diversity of theological perspective within the canonical scriptures and the later interpretative traditions of Judaism and Christianity. Arguably, the most significant point at which these interpreters differ is in the hermeneutical priority that they afford to one discipline or another within the dialogue or conversation. Sommer's approach is grounded in a commitment to the so-called neo-

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<sup>102</sup> In a more recent essay, entitled "Does Historical Criticism Exist?," Watson again takes up the question of the relationship and possible compatibility between theologically-oriented and more conventional modes of critical biblical scholarship, (as well as the necessary interrelationship between these modes and the hermeneutical and ideological commitments of those who employ them). He seeks to "detach the label 'historical criticism' from the ongoing reality of interpretative practice" (307), and he argues "not only that this label is misleading and limiting but also that it systematically distorts the reality it claims to represent. 'Historical criticism' is to be understood not as a neutral characterization of modern interpretative practice but as a rhetorical figure mobilized for transparent ideological ends" (307-308).

documentary approach to Pentateuchal criticism, involving a particular reconstruction of pre-existing sources. Having identified diverse theological perspectives among this source material within the world behind the text, he then seeks to demonstrate that later Jewish theological tradition stands in continuity with the plurality that he has identified.<sup>105</sup> In contrast, Watson seeks to give “primacy” to a theological orientation, yet without failing to engage with the rigors of historical and scientific discourse.<sup>106</sup>

### *Thesis and Outline of Argument*

In this study, I argue that the two accounts of Jeremiah’s temple sermon in Jer. 7:1–15 and 26:1–24 may be understood in their canonical forms as related components of the Jeremiah tradition, each of which communicates a conditional message of judgment aimed at provoking the repentance of its audience. While affirming the plausibility of a complex history of compositional development behind these texts, I challenge influential redaction-critical and traditio-historical hypotheses that, in my view, misconstrue the conditional dynamic operative in them. As an alternative interpretative framework, I propose a theologically-oriented hermeneutic that considers the nature of tradition from a philosophical and theological perspective as a way of embracing tensions and complexity within the biblical text, while emphasizing the continuity and coherence of the tradition that it both reflects and engenders. I maintain that both the traditions that are understood to have produced and shaped these texts, and the traditions within which they have been received as scripture, offer resources for a critical and theological interpretation of their subject matter.

In this first chapter I have introduced the exegetical scope of the study: namely, the temple sermon proper in Jer. 7:1–15 and the narrative of Jer. 26:1–24, which may be understood as the temple sermon revisited. Then, following a representative overview of previous scholarship dealing with the relationship between the two accounts in historical and literary perspective, I briefly introduced the hermeneutical approach of

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<sup>105</sup> Although Sommer does make the claim (see *Revelation and Authority*, ix and 5) that later theology might help an interpreter to better understand the biblical text, I would still maintain that he gives a distinct hermeneutical priority to the source-critical reconstructions of the neo-documentary school and then argues that the contributions of later Jewish thinkers correspond to and reinforce what has already discovered in the pre-canonical sources.

<sup>106</sup> See Watson, *Text, Church and World*, vii. Cf. idem, “Does Historical Criticism Exist?”

this study: namely, a form of theological interpretation of the Old Testament, construed as interdisciplinary dialogue between biblical criticism and theological discourse.

The purpose of the second chapter is two-fold. First, I offer an initial reading of the two accounts of the temple sermon as well as a preliminary discussion of some of the critical and hermeneutical issues raised by these texts and their relationship to one another. Second, I focus attention on two interpretative paradigms that have shaped the interpretation of the passages, especially in redaction-critical and traditio-historical discourse. Engaging with representative proponents of each, I discuss weaknesses and limitations within these existing hermeneutical frameworks, suggesting the need for an alternative that does justice to elements of both conflict and continuity within and behind the text. In the third chapter, I seek to reframe the critical and hermeneutical issues raised by the temple sermon, fleshing out this alternative, theologically-oriented framework. Without denying the legitimacy or importance of paying close attention to apparent evidence of the compositional history of these texts, I will point out weaknesses in some of the dominant hypotheses and then propose that the apparent tensions within the Jeremianic tradition may be helpfully reframed through a consideration of the nature and dynamics of tradition in philosophical and theological perspective.

Chapters four and five then present detailed, critical and theologically-oriented interpretations of Jer. 7:1–15 and 26:1–24, respectively. I argue that the initial account of the temple sermon in chap. 7 features a more prominent emphasis on the dynamics of divine presence and absence than is typically acknowledged, articulating both its conditional promise (7:3, 5–7) and its threat of judgment (7:12–15) in such terms. Although the canonical form of the text retains elements of tension and ambiguity, I maintain that these may be understood to reflect the theological subject matter of the text and its rhetorical interest in repentance rather than merely as evidence of its compositional history. Similarly, I argue that chapter 26 may be understood as a coherent narrative, despite its tensions and complexity, and also suggest that this text may be construed as an instance of inner-biblical exegesis, as it both offers an interpretation of 7:1–15 within the context of the tradition and also becomes part of the scriptural tradition itself. I argue that the text portrays a trial scene that deconstructs,

thereby problematizing the notion that the prophet or his message may be put on trial, highlighting the conditional dynamic of the prophetic word, and deflecting attention away from Jeremiah and toward the prophetic message and the community's response. The portrait that emerges both from chap. 26 and from the two accounts in relation to one another is that of a persistent attempt by YHWH to be present with his people and communicate his will, along with an invitation to future readers to heed and obey the prophetic word in a way that leads to repentance rather than perpetuating the covenantal failures that led to the judgment of exile.



## 2. Hermeneutical Paradigms and Theological Traditions

The purpose of this chapter is to set out an initial reading of the two Jeremianic texts that form the exegetical focus of this study and offer a critique of two influential hermeneutical frameworks that have shaped the exegetical understanding of these texts. This will function as preparation for the following chapter, in which I propose an alternative paradigm, reframing the concept of *tradition* that is central to these and many other traditio-historical and redaction-critical studies. In addition, it will serve as a foundation for my own reading of the accounts of the temple sermon in chapters four and five, where I attempt to illustrate and defend the implications of this reframing for the understanding of Jer. 7 and 26 and the relationship of these texts to one another.

In what follows I present an initial reading of the two accounts of the temple sermon, highlighting some of the critical issues raised by the texts, and then evaluate two interpretative paradigms by engaging representative tradition-historical and redaction-critical approaches to the study of Jer. 7:1–15 and 26:1–24. First I explore a feature of traditio-historical criticism that has often had a significant bearing upon the interpretation of the temple sermon(s) in Jeremiah: namely, the supposed doctrine of Zion's inviolability, held to be a key feature of Israel's Zion traditions and widely believed to be one of the main targets of Jeremiah's polemic in Jer. 7 and 26. I will argue not only that there is limited evidence that this doctrine is in view within the temple sermon itself, but also that the biblical texts that are frequently appealed to as expressions of this doctrine need not be understood in this way. I conclude that this particular feature of the standard reconstructions of the Zion tradition is not as plausible as is usually believed, and also that the form of 'mirror-reading' that is often applied to the text does not represent the most fruitful way to read Jeremiah's temple discourse. Next, I look at a related element of apparent tension within these texts that relates to wider redaction-critical hypotheses concerning the book of Jeremiah, namely, the relationship between conditional and apparently unconditional messages of divine judgment.

## *An Initial Reading: Jeremiah 7:1–15 and 26:1–24*

### *The Temple Sermon Proper: Jeremiah 7:1–15*

Set in the midst of a complex array of poetic images, scenes and pronouncements of judgement throughout the first ten chapters of the book, Jeremiah's temple sermon stands out as a striking example of fairly straightforward prosaic material. Thus, scholars have typically regarded it as the first of a series of 'prose sermons' scattered throughout the book, notable for their contrast with the poetic and biographical sections, for their sermon form, and for their close affinity with the language, style and theological framework of the book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, it is clear that the temple is not only the setting for, but also the central subject matter of, Jeremiah's address.<sup>2</sup> The introductory formulae of vv. 1–2 reveal that the prophet has been instructed to stand in the gate of YHWH's house (בשער בית יהוה), and speak to the people coming in to worship there, and he is instructed to proclaim the conditional promise that if repentance is forthcoming, then some form of dwelling will be made possible (v. 3).<sup>3</sup> Based on the way the narrative begins there is no indication that the prepositional phrase in v. 3, במקום הזה, would refer to anything but the temple in which Jeremiah stands and preaches; the possible antecedents for the demonstrative construction are the temple itself (בית יהוה), or else its gates (שערים) (v. 2).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In Mowinckel's influential source-critical division (see *Komposition*), this material is assigned to source C, whereas his predecessor, Duhm, regarded the prose material primarily as redactional additions attributable to the Deuteronomists (see *Jeremia*). Although most scholars have abandoned or significantly revised the early views of Duhm and Mowinckel, the relationship between the prose and poetic styles within the book, as well as the apparent relationship between much of the prose material, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History remain vibrant scholarly discussions. See, for example, Mastnjak, *Deuteronomy and Emergence*.

<sup>2</sup> So, Sweeney, *Reading Prophetic Books*, 144.

<sup>3</sup> The text-critical issue in vv. 3 and 7 and its implications for understanding the nature of this promise will be explored in detail in chapter four, below.

<sup>4</sup> One might be tempted to overlook the significance of vv. 1–2 MT: the comparatively brief introduction in LXX (ἀκούσατε λόγον κυρίου πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία) appears sufficient to set the scene, and therefore the piling up of a series of formulaic introductions in MT might be dismissed as mere evidence of editorial shaping. Yet, it is difficult to avoid the sense that vv. 1–2 MT give a distinct character to this version of the account, introducing the scene, providing its setting, and relating the first two exhortations of Jeremiah's message in a relatively seamless way. In addition, the material in 7:2b is envisioned as the first part of the actual oracle the



Moreover, the conditional promise of v. 3 is immediately followed by a warning not to trust deceptive words about the temple (היכל) (v. 4). Thus, both immediately preceding and immediately following the initial reference to some agent dwelling “*in this place*” (v. 3), the text features explicit references to the temple as both the context for the sermon and its subject matter.

This initial emphasis on the temple seems to undergo a subtle shift in vv. 5–7, as the prophet envisions the amendment of “ways and deeds” in terms that suggest justice and proper forms of worship taking place throughout the land, as opposed to matters of cultic behavior in the sanctuary itself. This apparent shift is confirmed by the appositional phrase in v. 7 (בארץ אשר נתתי לאבותיכם למן-עולם ועד-עולם), which explicitly identifies the potentially ambiguous “this place” as the land that had been given to Israel’s ancestors. William Holladay suggests that this constitutes a deliberate shift from a focus on the temple to a focus on the land; however, the following sections of the text reveal that the shift is neither decisive nor absolute.<sup>5</sup> As vv. 8–11 pick up and expand upon the prohibition of v. 4, the focus shifts back toward the temple itself, suggesting that the sanctuary is by no means unaffected by the kinds of injustice and idolatry that presumably take place throughout the land.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the final two occurrences of the flexible term מקום in vv. 12–15 retain a sense of ambiguity since it is used to denote both the sanctuary at Shiloh, in which YHWH’s name had dwelled previously (v. 12) and the land of Judah as whole (v. 14).<sup>7</sup> Another apparent shift

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prophet is instructed to deliver. Thus, both the narrative setting and the opening address together suggest the temple as the locale envisioned by ‘*this place*’ in v. 3.

<sup>5</sup> See Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:326-237; Lundbom (*Jeremiah* 1–20, 461-464) is content with recognizing some ambiguity in v. 3 but regards it as firmly resolved toward a focus on land in v. 7; in my view, he neglects the subsequent ambiguity in the use of the term מקום.

<sup>6</sup> Whereas the protasis of vv. 5–6 conveys a list of potential positive actions that would constitute an amending of ways, followed by the apodosis of verse 7 with the explicit mention of land, vv. 9–11 make use of interrogatives in the form of rhetorical questions to relate a similar list explicitly to temple worship. This significantly lessens the force of the above observation (i.e. that vv. 5–6 suggest an emphasis on the whole land and therefore not on the sanctuary) since in the latter context a similar list of actions seemingly related broadly to interpersonal ethics and life in the land is nevertheless related directly to the presumption of the people to stand before YHWH in the temple.

<sup>7</sup> In v. 12 the phrase is: אל-מקומי אשר בשילו אשר שכנתי שמי שם (to my place that was in Shiloh, where I established my name at first); in v. 14 it is: ולמקום אשר-נתתי לכם ולאבותיכם (and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers). If the apparently Deuteronomistic formula involving the establishing of YHWH’s name is being employed in v. 12, this must refer to the sanctuary at Shiloh. Yet, the final occurrence of the term, just as clearly, must refer to the land as a whole (cf. v. 7). Thus the

features in the final section of the text (vv. 12–15) as signaled by the temporal adverb *וַעֲתָה*, and by the announcement of imminent judgment that sits somewhat uncomfortably with the earlier conditional language of vv. 3–7.<sup>8</sup>

#### *The Temple Sermon Revisited: 26:1–24*

The opening narrative of what is widely regarded as the second major section of the book of Jeremiah (chaps. 26–45) portrays a conflict between the prophet and various authority figures in the Judahite community. Taking up specific language and motifs from the temple sermon in 7:1–15, chapter 26 describes an episode in which Jeremiah is sent by YHWH to the temple and commanded to deliver a severe prophetic warning to the people.<sup>9</sup> Jer. 26:1–6 provides an explicit historical setting that may then be applied to the sermon of chap. 7, assuming that the two accounts should be understood to reflect the same event within the world of the text. Although he is told to stand in the court (*הצר*) of the temple, rather than its gates (cf. 7:2), the setting and the prophetic message with which Jeremiah is commissioned in this latter context is strikingly similar to that of 7:1–15: his audience in both contexts is *כל־עַרְיֵי יְהוּדָה הַבָּאִים לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת בֵּית־יְהוָה* (v. 2; cf. 7:2);<sup>10</sup> the people are indicted for failing to hear and obey (*שָׁמַעַ*) the words of YHWH, which he has communicated persistently (*הַשְׁכַּח*) through his prophets (v. 5; cf. 7:13, 25);<sup>11</sup> the threat of judgment involves an allusion to the fate of Shiloh (vv. 6, 9; cf. 7:12,

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conclusion of the passage offers further support for my contention that the ambiguity between the two senses of the term ought to be preserved.

<sup>8</sup> On the use of *וַעֲתָה* in an emphatic and transitional sense see Waltke and O'Connor, *Syntax*, 38.1e and 39.4.4f.

<sup>9</sup> Whereas 7:1–15 is typically regarded as among the Deuteronomistic 'prose sermons' (Mowinckel's source C), the narrative of chap. 26 has usually been assigned to the biographical material (Mowinckel's source B). While source B was traditionally ascribed to the compositional role of Baruch, it is now more common to see Deuteronomistic influence in various sections with much more uncertainty about who composed which sets of material, and how exactly it all developed.

<sup>10</sup> As with the minor variation between the locale being described as the temple gates or its court, the slight variation of *כל־יְהוּדָה הַבָּאִים בְּשַׁעְרֵי הָאֵלָה לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לַיהוָה* in 7:2 exhibits more similarities than differences. Moreover, the combination of the substantive participle and infinitive construct (*הַבָּאִים...לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת*) to describe the worshippers constitutes a rare construction, found elsewhere only in Ezek. 46:9 and 2 Sam. 15:32. See Dubbink, "A Story of Three Prophets," 16, n. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Again, the connections are by no means precise: the reference to YHWH's servants the prophets (*עֲבָדֵי הַנְּבִיאִים*) comes at some remove from what I have identified as the temple sermon proper, although arguably the combination of this motif with the *הַשְׁכַּח וְשָׁלַח* formula in 7:25 and 26:5 may be understood to be implicit within the variation on that formula in 7:13, where the subject is YHWH himself (*הַשְׁכַּח וְדַבֵּר*).

14); and in his opportunity to defend and restate his cause, Jeremiah employs the familiar imperative phrase *הישיבו דרכיכם ומעלליכם* (v. 13; cf. 7:3, 5).<sup>12</sup> While there are obvious differences between these passages, there are enough distinctive correspondences between them to establish the plausibility of a deliberate literary relationship having been established between them during the compositional process.<sup>13</sup>

If it is granted that the two texts represent accounts of the same prophetic message, then surely the most striking difference between the two is that chap. 26 features only a brief account of the sermon ‘proper’, then launches into a complex narrative account of its aftermath. In vv. 7–11 a commotion ensues, as initially the religious leadership and then certain political figures arrive on the scene. The priests, prophets, and general populace seize Jeremiah and charge him with blasphemy, whereas the more restrained *שרים* appear to position themselves as juridical authorities. After the charges are reiterated the prophet is given a chance to defend himself (vv. 12–15). He takes the opportunity to reiterate the legitimacy of his prophetic commission from YHWH, the content of his message, and the dire consequences of failing to listen by silencing YHWH’s prophet. On first glance, verse 16 then constitutes a final scene whereby the *שרים* articulate a concise and reasonable verdict, absolving Jeremiah of any wrongdoing; however, a series of puzzling scenes then follow in which new characters are introduced (*מזקני הארץ*) and cite the precedent of a similar prophetic word given by one Micah of Moresheth (vv. 17–19), yet another precedent is recounted, concerning one Uriah, son of Shemaiah, from Kiriath-Jearim (vv. 20–23) and the sudden realization that Jeremiah is still in mortal danger is simultaneously announced and resolved by a *deus ex machina*, going by the name of Ahikam, son of Shaphan (v. 24).

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<sup>12</sup> Other significant lexical parallels between the passages as a whole include the *יהוה צבאות* epithet (7:3; 26:18) and the *דם נקי* motif (7:6; 26:15); in addition, thematic links that are implicit in the context of Jer. 7 come to the fore in chap. 26, for example, the ambiguity of the term *מקום* in chap. 7 seems to suggest that both the temple and the land are in view of the prophetic critique, as they explicitly are in chap. 26. See further discussion on each of these points in chapters four and five below.

<sup>13</sup> This way of framing the issue leaves open the question of whether such a relationship is best construed in terms of the literary dependence of chap. 26 upon chap. 7, or in terms of editorial influence having been applied to both. However, even in the case of the latter construal it remains the case that the effect of redaction cannot be conceived of merely as the addition of formulaic material as elsewhere in the book, but rather it appears to have deliberately drawn these two texts into a close intratextual and hermeneutical relationship.

For some interpreters, a “strong thematic unity” is evident within this text, despite its complexity.<sup>14</sup> Some would go so far as to claim that this passage represents the fullest glimpse available into models of jurisprudence in ancient Israel.<sup>15</sup> For others, however, the convoluted sequence of events and apparent inconsistencies within the text preclude the possibility of regarding Jer. 26 as a narrative unity, let alone a paradigmatic trial scene.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to each of these interpretative trajectories I will suggest that the recapitulation of the temple sermon in Jer. 26 may be understood as a coherent narrative account in which the very notion of putting the prophet on trial is subverted and critiqued. Although language and motifs indicative of legal procedures are indeed conspicuously present, the ambiguity of roles attributed to various character groups, together with the disordered progression of events, causes the trial scene to deconstruct. Such a reading seeks to do justice to both the elements and motifs that signal some kind of formal legal process and the various exegetical problems associated with interpreting it as a straightforward trial narrative.

In addition to the hermeneutical significance of their intratextual relationship, the two accounts of the temple sermon in Jer. 7:1–15 and 26:1–24 raise a number of critical, interpretative issues. Various elements of tension and ambiguity within these texts have given rise not only to ongoing discussions regarding particular exegetical points, but also to distinctive interpretative frameworks that have developed over time and have therefore come to influence subsequent interpretations. Two of these frameworks will be highlighted and evaluated in what follows, while many of the technical details will be addressed in subsequent chapters, where I will come to present

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<sup>14</sup> So, for example, Dubbink, “A Story of Three Prophets,” 28, and Osuji, *Where is Truth?*, 119–161, esp. 123–124.

<sup>15</sup> See Boecker, *Redeformen* and Westbrook, “Trial of Jeremiah.” Cf. Holtz, “Trial Procedure,” 414–420.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 56–61, Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 515–521, Hossfeld & Meyer, “Prophet vor dem Tribunal,” 32. Apparent inconsistencies include the people ‘switching sides’ and the priests and prophets ‘misquoting’ Jeremiah. The sense of incoherence arises from the apparent ‘false conclusion’ in v. 16, the ambiguity related to how the accounts of Micah and Uriah relate to each other and fit within the context of the chapter; and the surprising dynamic created by Ahikam’s dramatic rescue of Jeremiah, although the situation seemed to have already been resolved.

my own reading of the texts in the light of an alternative hermeneutical paradigm.<sup>17</sup>

The two sets of critical issues and hermeneutical implications are the traditio-historical hypothesis concerning a conflict between the Jeremiah tradition and a supposed doctrine of Zion's inviolability, and the redaction-critical hypothesis that the tensions between conditional and unconditional intimations of judgment are best explained as the result of conflicting perspectives operative within the process of compositional development.<sup>18</sup>

### *Jeremiah's Supposed Conflict with the Inviolability Doctrine*

The first hermeneutical framework arises out of a consideration of the polemical nature of the prophet's message in Jer. 7:1–15, and the supposition that it is not only intended to reveal the word of YHWH, but also to challenge a particular mindset or a contradictory message that is prominent – or at least potentially influential – among the community.<sup>19</sup> The dominant hypothesis that shapes the interpretation of this text is that Jeremiah's audience believed in the doctrine of Zion's inviolability. This is understood as a conviction, developed within the Zion tradition, that because YHWH dwells in the Jerusalem temple, the safety of both the city and the sanctuary are guaranteed. Appealing to this traditio-historical hypothesis, many interpreters assume or contend that the deceptive words referred to in vv. 4 and 8, as well as the mistaken presumption of safety articulated in v. 10, should be understood as expressions of belief in this doctrine.<sup>20</sup> The people chant their mantra about the temple and presume

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<sup>17</sup> For the sake of clarity, I will engage with one primary advocate of each framework that I am seeking to challenge, with discussion of other scholars, similar theories, and related arguments serving a subsidiary role.

<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, it is useful to note that whereas the first set of issues operates primarily within a traditio-historical framework the second centers mainly on redaction-critical hypotheses. On the other hand, there is considerable overlap between these methodologies, and many of the scholars discussed below understand themselves to be blending them, to some extent, in their reconstructions of layers of tradition as well as the tradents/traditionists responsible for the transmission and development of the Jeremiah tradition.

<sup>19</sup> This hypothesis may be understood to relate primarily to Jer. 7 and only secondarily, or by extension, to Jer. 26; nevertheless, it influences the interpretation of both texts (see below).

<sup>20</sup> The content of these "deceptive words" (דברי השקר) that are not to be trusted remains unclear, not least due to the odd textual issue in v. 4; in addition, precisely in what way the people imagine themselves to be "safe" (נצילנו, v. 10) is open to at least two possible interpretations. According to the inviolability hypothesis, these verses feature slogans or quotations that may be attributed to the people of Judah and/or their leaders, thereby revealing their theological

themselves to be safe from foreign attack because the presence of YHWH in the sanctuary provides an absolute guarantee of divine protection.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to this belief, it is suggested, the Deuteronomistic perspective of the book of Jeremiah insists that YHWH's covenant is conditional, and that the breaking of this covenant will result in divine judgment upon Judah, in the form of exile. The plausibility of a conflict between this perspective and the inviolability doctrine is seemingly enhanced by the two references to the temple as *בית הזה אשר נקרא שמי עליו* in vv. 10–11, as well as the notion of YHWH's name dwelling at Shiloh articulated in v. 12. Each of these phrases calls to mind the so-called “name theology” of the book of Deuteronomy and the DtrH, which is often understood to express both a theological corrective to the more primitive Zion theology and also a distinct understanding of the nature of divine presence from that of priestly theology. According to this view, when Jeremiah (like the book of Deuteronomy) speaks of God's *שם* dwelling in the temple, as in the latter portion of the temple sermon, this is intended as a theological polemic of sorts over against theological expressions of YHWH's presence in the temple that emphasize divine immanence in an unacceptable way.<sup>22</sup>

Consideration of Jer. 26 in the light of these issues is frequently understood to lend further support to the hypothesis of an attack on the doctrine of inviolability. The conflict in this narrative turns on the charge that Jeremiah has prophesied against the city of Jerusalem and its temple (26:6, 9, 11), the two main entities that are held to be inviolable according to this putative dogma of the Zion tradition. The two precedents that are cited in vv. 18–23 feature other prophets who apparently spoke against the Zion tradition, with one even using the term *צִיּוֹן* explicitly.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the references to

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convictions about the relationship between the temple and divine presence, and influencing how the prophet's polemic should be understood.

<sup>21</sup> Among the many examples that might be cited as proponents of this approach to the temple sermon, aside from commentators and scholars discussed at length below, see Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 359; Clements, *God and Temple*, 84; Overholt, *Threat of Falsehood*, 1-23; Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 166; Levine, “Prophetic Attitudes,” 220-221.

<sup>22</sup> See von Rad, *Studies*, 37-44; Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 48-80, and Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 58-68. For critiques and reevaluations of the notion of name theology and its relation to P, see Wilson, *Out of the Midst*, Richter, *Deuteronomistic History*, and Hundley, “To Be or Not to Be.”

<sup>23</sup> The text is unclear about whether the elders of the land cite both of these accounts, or only the first (vv. 18–19) with the episode concerning Uriah (vv. 20–23) best attributed to the voice of the narrator. This issue will be considered in more detail in chapter five below.

the fate of Shiloh in 7:12–15 and 26:4–6 (cf. v. 9), combined with the epithet יהוה צבאות in 7:3 and 26:18, appear to serve as further evidence that the Zion tradition forms the theological or ideological background against which the prophet's invective is to be understood.<sup>24</sup>

*Marvin Sweeney and Benjamin Sommer: A Conflict of Traditions?*

In a recently published handbook, Marvin Sweeney nicely sums up the way in which these features are thought to work together to support a portrayal of conflicting theological traditions operative behind the text. For illustrative purposes, his formulations are worth quoting at length:

Jeremiah's well-known Temple sermon in chapter 7 presents a striking critique of the people's contention that the presence of the Jerusalem Temple would guarantee the security of the city. The narrative concerning his trial for sedition in Jeremiah 26 emphasizes the theme of Jerusalem's destruction when Micah's statement that Jerusalem will be destroyed (Mic 3:12) is cited in defense of Jeremiah. In true Levitical (and Deuteronomistic) fashion, Jeremiah maintains that security is achieved only insofar as the people abide by divine Torah; without adherence to YHWH's Torah, the city and the Temple will be lost, just as Shiloh was lost centuries before.<sup>25</sup>

The above statement appears in a context in which Sweeney delineates the various theological traditions that he understands each of the biblical prophetic books to be aligned with, as well as how these distinct traditions and the associated "theological worldviews" impact the intertextual interaction between the books. He explains,

Each prophet understood the divine will in relation to a distinct theological tradition. Isaiah was heavily influenced by the royal Davidic/Zion tradition that viewed YHWH's eternal promises to the royal house of David and the city of Jerusalem as the foundation for Israel's and Judah's relationship with God. Jeremiah was a priest of the Elide line of Shiloh who held that adherence to divine Torah or instruction was the foundation of the relationship with God. Ezekiel was a Zadokite priest of the Jerusalem Temple who viewed the Temple as the center of creation and called on Israel and Judah to play their roles in maintaining both the ethical and ritual holiness of creation. Each of the twelve prophets likewise had his own distinctive theological worldview that provided the foundation of his respective understanding of Israel's and Judah's relationship with God.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Mettinger, *Dethronement*. It is worth noting that although 26:18 is apparently citing Micah 3:12, this epithet is a feature of the citation alone, and not the cited passage in its Micah context.

<sup>25</sup> Sweeney, "Latter Prophets," 239-240.

<sup>26</sup> Sweeney, "Latter Prophets," 235.

Here, one senses an implicit contrast between the Isaianic confidence in “YHWH’s eternal promises” and the conditional element in Jeremiah’s emphasis on adherence to Torah, not to mention Ezekiel’s priestly view. Although Sweeney acknowledges that one’s interpretation of the relationships between these prophetic books will vary depending upon whether one adopts a synchronic or diachronic approach (and he seems to imply the in-principle legitimacy of each), he remains committed to the presupposition that there is a crucial difference between the portrayals of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The author goes on to articulate the contrast between their respective understandings of covenant, explaining: “Whereas the book of Isaiah maintains the continuity of YHWH’s covenant with David/Jerusalem/Israel as the basis for its portrayal of Jerusalem’s restoration, the book of Jeremiah posits a change in covenant that will ultimately result in restoration of the city and its people.”<sup>27</sup> While Sweeney by no means regards conditionality as absent from Isaiah’s theology, he reflects and contributes to the widespread view that Isaiah’s confidence in the Zion tradition may be contrasted with Jeremiah’s opposition to it.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise, Benjamin Sommer highlights distinctive elements of the portrayal of divine presence in the book of Jeremiah in relation to other prophetic texts, and suggests that the temple sermon may be understood as the paradigmatic instance of the way that Jeremiah’s Deuteronomistic perspective comes into conflict with other views and traditions. In his *Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (2009), Sommer suggests that the perspective evident in the book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History calls to mind Paul Tillich’s comment that Protestant Christianity is “a religion of the ear and not of the eye” – an indication of the privileging of the revelatory Word over the aesthetic dimension – to which the theology of P and J and most prophets is a striking contrast.<sup>29</sup> In an endnote Sommer explains further:

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<sup>27</sup> Sweeney, “Latter Prophets,” 240.

<sup>28</sup> After discussing the confrontation with Hannaniah in Jer. 27–28, Sweeney goes so far as to suggest that the kind of message of security that Jeremiah regards as false prophecy in the context of his own book entails that he must have regarded Isaiah as a false prophet (“Latter Prophets,” 240). On this subject, see the fuller argumentation of Sweeney, “True and False Prophecy.”

<sup>29</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 135.



Thus it is significant that for all the many similarities among the prophetic call narratives in Exodus 3-4, Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, and Ezekiel 1-3, the call of Jeremiah stands out: *For Jeremiah, the most deuteronomic of prophets, lacks any vision of God.* Jeremiah hears and (in verse 9) feels God, but unlike Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, he does not see God. In light of this distinction, it is not surprising that Jeremiah's (iconoclastic, Protestant) attack in Jeremiah 7 and 26 on those who love the temple building too much can be read as an implicit attack on Isaiah and Psalms, which uphold the doctrine of Zion's inviolability. *Jeremiah, like Deuteronomy, does not believe in sacred space, whereas Isaiah and Psalms do.*<sup>30</sup>

While Sommer's account is focused more narrowly on the theologies of divine presence within various biblical texts, it shares with Sweeney's treatment a conviction that certain elements of difference within such texts reflect a conflict between theological traditions that have shaped their composition. In addition, both Sweeney and Sommer suggest that the two accounts of Jeremiah's temple sermon are best understood as representative of the conflict between ancient traditions concerning the relationship between divine presence and the security of the temple, city and people of Jerusalem.

While it is clear that Jer. 7:1-15 involves some kind of critique of and warning against deceptive words and beliefs that encourage a misplaced form of trust, and also that the ensuing conflict between Jeremiah and his opponents in chap. 26 highlights the risks associated with speaking words of judgment against the temple and the city, I suggest that an interpretative focus upon a hypothetical conflict between opposing theologies of divine presence is not the most helpful reading strategy and that the specific concept of an inviolability doctrine constitutes something of a 'red herring'.<sup>31</sup> To anticipate the subsequent discussion, I will seek to show that a putative conflict between opposing sub-traditions, or doctrines concerning divine presence, may be helpfully reframed in terms of perennial issues related to trust and complacency in the context of religious traditions. While there are, no doubt, distinct perspectives articulated within the Old Testament, and even legitimate tensions between many of them, my reevaluation of these traditio-historical reconstructions in the light of a theological account of the nature of tradition (below) will suggest the importance of

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<sup>30</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 256, n. 56 (my emphasis).

<sup>31</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Walter Moberly for this way of phrasing the interpretative issue.

doing justice to elements of continuity and coherence within which context elements of tension and diversity may be understood.

### *The Provenance of the Doctrine of Inviolability*

The so-called doctrine of Zion's inviolability constitutes one key feature of the broader traditio-historical identification of the Zion tradition, which is understood to have had a considerable influence upon the development of Israelite religion and the composition of the Hebrew Bible. According to Ben C. Ollenburger, pioneers in the development of traditio-historical research such as Noth and von Rad were instrumental in pointing toward something like a Zion tradition, yet it was Edzard Rohland, a student of von Rad, who truly pioneered research in this area by identifying the Zion tradition based on his analysis of "a cluster of motifs" related to Zion in the Psalms:

- Zion as the peak of Zaphon, the highest mountain (Ps. 48:3–4)
- The river of paradise flowing from it (Ps. 46:5)
- YHWH's triumph at Zion over the chaotic flood-waters (46:3)
- YHWH's triumph over the kings and nations (46:7; 48:5–7; 76:4, 6–7).<sup>32</sup>

Subsequent scholarship has modified and refined the profile of the Zion tradition in various ways; however, according to Ollenburger, "If we limit ourselves to the motifs identified by Rohland and most other scholars, the Zion tradition consists of four principal motifs that express *Yahweh's choice of Zion as his city, and the consequent security of that city* against the threat of natural and super-natural forces."<sup>33</sup> Given the close, causal link here identified between election and security within the reconstructed tradition, it is perhaps unsurprising that something along the lines of the theory of the inviolability doctrine would suggest itself to scholars and come to gain wide acceptance.

In their effort to identify the origins of the specific doctrine of inviolability within the context of the Zion tradition, most scholars focus on the expressions of

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<sup>32</sup> Ollenburger, *Zion*, 15; Ollenburger explains that, of all these motifs, Rohland regarded the last one as central, and further identified key subthemes related to YHWH's triumph (terror caused by theophany and/or divine reproach; triumph before morning; destroying weapons, and war itself). Cf. Roberts, "Zion in Theology," 93-94.

<sup>33</sup> Ollenburger, *Zion*, 16 (my emphasis).

confidence in YHWH's deliverance and protection in the Zion Psalms (especially Pss. 46, 48 and 76) and the book of Isaiah, as well as the tradition concerning the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem during the time of Hezekiah, reflected in both 2 Kings 18–20 and Isaiah 36–39.<sup>34</sup> In one of the most frequently-cited essays concerning the origins and development of the doctrine of Zion's inviolability, John H. Hayes argues that pre-Israelite, Canaanite-influenced beliefs about the cosmic mountain as the dwelling place of the divine, and the resultant divine protection that may be expected, have survived in the Zion Psalms.<sup>35</sup> He explains, "These psalms emphasize the impregnability of the city protected by God *without* basing this upon the special traditions concerning his election of Zion and the establishment of his temple."<sup>36</sup> For Hayes, it is the link between these traditions and those of Zion's election, which was "originally based on Yahweh's presence in Zion symbolized by ark and temple," that accounts for the emergence of a doctrine of the city's invulnerability.<sup>37</sup> He maintains that

The Zion tradition which centered around Yahweh's choice of Jerusalem as his dwelling place was, like the Davidic election tradition, joined to and expanded by pre-Israelite traditions. It is in these traditions, rather than in the prophetic

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<sup>34</sup> Ollenburger explains that the identification of the Zion tradition and its main contours arose initially out of research on the Psalms, especially those that came to be known as the Songs of Zion (46, 48, 76, 84, 87 and 122). Gunkel understood these to be of a 'hymnic form' and grouped them together because of this genre overlap as well as the common theme – and thus presumed *Sitz im Leben* of "the cultic celebration of Jerusalem's glory" (*Zion*, 16). The other key element in the reconstruction of the origin of the Zion tradition is the possible connection between Pss. 46, 48 and 76 to the events of 701 BCE portrayed in 2 Kgs. 19:32–37//Isa. 36:33–38, that is, the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem during the siege of Sennacherib, as an apparent result of Hezekiah's prayer (18).

<sup>35</sup> The impetus for Hayes's study is a reconsideration of the position of John Bright, who had argued in an earlier commentary on Isaiah that the "later dogma of the inviolability of Zion" may be traced back to the invasion of Sennacherib reflected in 2 Kgs. 18–20//Isa. 36–39 and the "marvelous deliverance of Jerusalem" that seems to have taken place (Hayes, "Zion's Inviolability," 419, citing John Bright, "Isaiah I," 514). In contrast, Hayes argues that "the origin of the tradition of Zion's inviolability is much older than and unrelated to Sennacherib's invasion" (419, n. 1).

<sup>36</sup> Hayes, "Zion's Inviolability," 422 (my emphasis). The author argues that the emerging doctrine of David's election was joined with elements from pre-Israelite worship in the locale that would become Jerusalem, and then he goes on to explain, "In a similar manner, I think it can be shown that the special tradition concerning Zion's election, which was originally based on Yahweh's presence in Zion symbolized by ark and temple, incorporated pre-Israelite traditional thought concerning Zion as a holy place protected by the divine. This is apparent in certain of the Zion Psalms (46, 48, and 76) and is witnessed by some of the Zion speeches in Isaiah" (421).

<sup>37</sup> Hayes, "Zion's Inviolability," 421.

work of Isaiah that the origin of the tradition of Zion's inviolability must be found.<sup>38</sup>

According to Ollenburger, the notion of YHWH's kingship is central to Zion symbolism, and this general notion suggests a number of related corollaries: namely, that YHWH is understood as creator and defender, that he has chosen David and Zion, and that Zion itself serves as a symbol of security and refuge. Thus, "Zion is enabled to symbolize security and refuge because Yahweh reigns there as creator/defender."<sup>39</sup> Ollenburger explains that "The central feature of the Jerusalem cult tradition, and that which bestowed upon Zion its sacral character, is the belief that Yahweh dwells among his people in Jerusalem," and thus everything else that may be said about the Zion tradition must depend upon the prior and more fundamental notion of YHWH's presence there and of it being his chosen place to dwell.<sup>40</sup> In an endnote, he explains, "This is especially true of Zion's supposed inviolability. Note especially the connection in Ps. 46.6 between Yahweh's presence and the security of Zion. Even in such texts as Micah 3.11 and Jer 7, in which the notion of inviolability is attested, the important factor is the presence of Yahweh, not some independent notion of the mountain's sacral character."<sup>41</sup>

The traditio-historical reconstruction of the doctrine of Zion's inviolability, as one particular feature of the Zion tradition, is clearly dependent upon a particular reading of key biblical texts and their relationship to one another. It is striking how easily and consistently scholars who develop or appeal to this reconstruction take for

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<sup>38</sup> Hayes, "Zion's Inviolability," 422. The author goes on to discuss the particular ways in which the prophet Isaiah later develops these blended traditions reflecting the inviolability of Zion in his own way (see 424-426). Not only did Isaiah offer an explicitly theological interpretation of the hostile forces of foreign nations so as to understand their onslaught as divine judgment, but the prophet also, "called for faith in Yahweh as a *condition* of salvation and protection," such that trusting in YHWH, in explicit contrast to trusting in Egypt or human forms of protection, became linked to security and deliverance (Hayes cites Isa. 7:9 and 31:1, 4-9 as examples of the conditional dynamic being attached to the inviolability motif, and he cites Isa. 10:5-6, 29:1-8 and 28:21 as examples of the ascription of divine agency to the advances of foreign nations).

<sup>39</sup> Ollenburger, *Zion*, 53. This citation nicely sums up the interrelationship between sovereignty, presence (election), and security that is central to the author's understanding the theological symbolism. On the connection between divine presence and national security, he comments, "This component of Zion symbolism has been traditionally viewed as the predominant aspect of the Zion tradition, leading scholars to speak of the inviolability of Zion/Jerusalem" (66, citing Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 67-69 and J.H. Hayes, "Zion's Inviolability," 419-426).

<sup>40</sup> Ollenburger, *Zion*, 23. cf. Clements, *God and Temple*, 71-76.

<sup>41</sup> Ollenburger, *Zion*, 168, n. 2, and he also refers the reader here to Clements, *God and Temple*, 71.

granted one particular reading of these texts, failing to consider the weaknesses of this reading or plausible alternatives. To be sure, the three Zion Psalms cited repeatedly by Hayes, Roberts and Ollenburger feature expressions of praise to YHWH and of confidence in him as a source of strength and safety (46:2–4; 76:2–3), envision divine protection in the face of hostile enemies (46:7–10; 48:5–9; 76:4–10), and construe faith or trust as an appropriate human response to YHWH (46:11; 48:10–15; 76:11–13). Moreover, it is neither implausible nor hard to imagine that the use of these texts in liturgical settings, alongside an awareness of the tradition concerning the dramatic narrative of Hezekiah’s deliverance in 2 Ki. 18–20//Isa. 36–39 might have bolstered a robust sense of assurance in the power of YHWH to act in deliverance on behalf of his people. However, I am not convinced that a careful reading of these texts warrants Hayes’s conclusion that, “The city is presented as a place divinely protected and *unconquerable* by any enemy.”<sup>42</sup>

First, if one brackets the widely-accepted view that these texts *do* reflect a doctrine of Zion’s inviolability, it should become apparent that there is no necessary, logical connection between the perspective they express and the concept of an absolute guarantee of divine protection. In his incisive argument against fallacious, “pseudo-historicist” approaches to dating Pentateuchal literature, Benjamin Sommer points out that religious beliefs reflected in particular biblical texts should not be understood narrowly or reductively as the result of a particular historical experience, nor necessarily as a product of a time period that is understood to promote or resist such beliefs.<sup>43</sup> Rather, a perspective expressed within biblical literature may plausibly be understood as an expression of a timeless or perennial feature of religious belief, transcending its immediate setting and concrete socio-historical conditions.<sup>44</sup> Within both Jewish and Christian tradition, it is by no means uncommon for people of faith to express a profound sense of confidence and trust in God while maintaining a healthy and robust sense of contingency regarding the future, not least given the relational and covenantal nature of these religious traditions. An awareness of the possibility of this dynamic as a perennial feature of religious belief ought to give interpreters pause

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<sup>42</sup> Hayes, “Zion’s Inviolability,” 423 (my emphasis).

<sup>43</sup> See Sommer, “Dating Pentateuchal Texts,” esp. 91 and 101.

<sup>44</sup> Sommer, “Dating Pentateuchal Texts,” 106.

when faced with the claim, or the assumption, that texts such as the Zion Psalms reflect a belief in the absolute guarantee of divine protection.<sup>45</sup>

Second, as Moberly has cogently argued, rhetoric that expresses a conviction about what will happen in the future may be unconditional in form, and yet conditional in function, due to the relational and self-involving nature of prophetic and religious speech. Thus, for example, Jeremiah's many pronouncements of imminent divine judgement need not be understood as unconditional predictions of what *must* happen, but rather may be read as warnings designed to provoke people to repentance (see, for example, the rationale communicated in Jer. 26:3; 36:3).<sup>46</sup> In a similar way, positive expressions of an unwavering trust in God's power and faithfulness to act in deliverance on behalf of his people, his temple, and his city need not be understood as flattened beliefs in an unconditional guarantee, but rather as profound theological convictions expressed within a framework that recognizes the contingencies associated with covenantal relationship.<sup>47</sup> In other words, one may express with certainty a conviction about God's power and even desire to act, and yet still acknowledge that the outcome of the future depends, in part, upon the response of humanity. Each of the texts that are usually cited as evidence of the doctrine of Zion's inviolability are open to being read in this way, rather than as expressions of belief in an unconditional guarantee.

#### *John Bright and The Inviolability Doctrine in Jer. 7 and 26*

The assumption that the primary target of Jeremiah's polemic in the temple sermon is the popular doctrine of Zion's inviolability is so widespread that it will be worthwhile to consider one influential formulation of the hypothesis as a way of focusing the

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<sup>45</sup> I do not deny that aberrant expressions of religious belief can and do arise within religious traditions, and one might point to certain elements of the so-called "prosperity gospel" as a contemporary phenomenon analogous to the putative belief in unconditional protection within the Zion tradition. However, it remains the case that the texts that are appealed to as expressions of the doctrine of inviolability are open to a number of different readings and so should not automatically or necessarily be understood as expressions of such a belief.

<sup>46</sup> See Moberly's discussions of Jer. 18 and Ezek. 33 in *Prophecy and Discernment*, 48-55, 95-99 and *Old Testament Theology*, 121-122, as well as his interpretation of Jonah in *ibid.*, 181ff.

<sup>47</sup> In other words, there is no good reason to suppose that such bold expressions of confidence in YHWH's power to deliver, even if based on past experiences of deliverance, are incompatible with a belief that YHWH will bring judgment rather than deliverance, in the event that overarching covenantal conditions are not met.

present discussion. John Bright's *Covenant and Promise* (1976) is a fitting candidate not only because this particular traditio-historical hypothesis is central to its overall argument, but also because of the significant influence this and other of Bright's works have had upon the reconstruction of ancient Israel's theological development and the interpretation of the book of Jeremiah.<sup>48</sup> In this monograph Bright develops a thesis concerning the development of Israel's pre-exilic prophetic eschatology in which the book of Jeremiah plays a key role. Indeed, the study begins with reference to the apparent conflict between the prophet Jeremiah and his contemporaries regarding the future of the nation of Judah, and what course of action will be necessary in order to ensure its survival.<sup>49</sup> According to Bright, Jer. 7:1–15 and 26:1–24, among other texts, reflect the stark distinction between the prophet's conviction that that the nation could not avoid the impending exile and thus ought to face and accept this reality as God's judgment, and the "majority opinion" of his contemporaries, who maintained a stubborn confidence in the faithfulness of YHWH to deliver them and thus in the continued future of their nation.<sup>50</sup>

Presuming that both accounts of the temple sermon reflect the same historical event, dated with precision to the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign (609/608 BCE), Bright argues that the temple sermon in chap. 7 reflects Jeremiah's forceful contradiction of "the popular belief in Yahweh's eternal and unconditional choice of Mt. Zion," as well as a denunciation of "the belief that the physical presence of Yahweh's Temple guarantees protection."<sup>51</sup> He argues that the prophet emphasizes the importance of reformed behavior and the conditional nature of divine presence and protection in a

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<sup>48</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*. Throughout this book, which is based on a series of lectures, the author frequently directs the reader's attention to either his *History of Israel* or his Jeremiah commentary for fuller detail and argumentation. Although the developments of recent decades in OT scholarship render Bright's confidence in the historicity of certain events behind the biblical text somewhat out of date, the arguments and assumptions he makes regarding the apparent incommensurability of conditional and unconditional expressions of divine promises remain prominent even in much more recent scholarship, not least when it comes to the so-called doctrine or inviolability and the apparent tension between conditional and unconditional judgment language in Jeremiah.

<sup>49</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 15–16. The author explains that the impetus for the lectures upon which the book is based an issue that arises in relation to the "career" of this prophet, a tension and conflict that, according to Bright, constituted "a problem that plagued Jeremiah throughout his entire life" (15–16).

<sup>50</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 16–17.

<sup>51</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 163.

way that challenges the Zion tradition: “In a word, Jeremiah has made Yahweh’s election of Mt. Zion and his promise to dwell there forever flatly subject to the conditions of the Mosaic covenant!”<sup>52</sup> Bright goes on to explain that, “From the biographical account in ch. 26 we learn that Jeremiah was very nearly lynched for saying this,” and he contends that this should come as no surprise considering the prophet “flatly contradicted a central tenet of the official theology.”<sup>53</sup>

The author maintains that “So explosive a tension cannot be explained merely as a difference of political opinion...this was no clash between patriotic men who had calculated the odds...Least of all was it a collision between a man of sincere theological convictions and men who had no convictions.”<sup>54</sup> Rather, he explains:

The truth is that Jeremiah and his opponents held equally strong *theological convictions*. Jeremiah was convinced – on theological grounds – that the nation had fallen under God’s judgment and would be destroyed if it continued on its course. His opponent’s [*sic*] were convinced – again on theological grounds – that such a thing could never happen: God would not allow it! On the contrary, he would come to the defense of the nation, intervene in the nick of time with a miracle and save it. The fact that they drove the nation to suicide does not alter the strength of their convictions. It was a collision *precisely in the realm of theology*. It was a collision between two understandings of the nation’s relationship to God and its future under God, a clash regarding the nature of God’s promises to the nation and the extent to which he was committed to its defense. The fate of the nation was at stake. On the one side stood men who apparently believed that the nation’s survival was unconditionally assured by the promises of God; against them stood a prophet who was clearly convinced that it was not...One is moved to ask how two such diametrically opposite views of the matter could ever have arisen within the same religious community.<sup>55</sup>

In Bright’s view, this collision of theological perspectives did not merely arise out of the reflection of those involved upon their immediate situation, but also involved elements of inherited wisdom, as “both Jeremiah and his opponents could claim the

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<sup>52</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 164.

<sup>53</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 164.

<sup>54</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 16-17. As will be seen below, this notion of a clash between divergent political views on what course of action would be most prudent for the nation to take is central to more recent redaction-critical proposals such as Carolyn Sharp’s; however, it is prudent to recognize that Sharp also regards theological and ideological convictions to be at stake.

<sup>55</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 17 (my emphasis). Whereas Bright takes his final remark in this citation as an opportunity to give an account of how this situation may have come about, I take it in a slightly different way: that is, to suggest that his reconstruction of “such diametrically opposed views...within the same religious community” may be somewhat implausible and therefore the textual evidence for this conflict ought to be reevaluated.



support of ancient theological traditions” in their reasoning about the best course of action for the future.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, much of the traditio-historical analysis that follows represents the author’s effort to understand the development of Israel’s “remarkable openness toward the future” not merely for its own sake but also in order to better understand how such a conflict might have come about.<sup>57</sup>

Bright locates the origins of the conflict of Jeremiah’s day within a more ancient tension between two complexes of traditions related to the election of Israel and the covenant between the nation and YHWH. On the one hand, the patriarchal traditions associated with the Abrahamic covenant, and the subsequent yet related traditions of the election of David’s house as YHWH’s royal representative and of Zion as his earthly dwelling place, reflect an unconditional assurance based on the promises of YHWH and a confidence in his faithfulness to act in accordance with them. On the other hand, the traditions associated with the Sinai covenant evince a conditional dynamic whereby explicit conditions and obligations are attached to the election of Israel and their potential to experience continued divine blessing and protection in the future.<sup>58</sup> According to Bright, although the biblical narrative provides “hints of two conceptions of God’s election of Israel, and of Israel’s relationship to God, that are quite different, and that might readily give rise to different ways of viewing the future,” nevertheless “They are not intrinsically incompatible; rather so we shall argue, they are complementary, and both are essential to the structure of Israel’s faith. But they differ so markedly in emphasis that the possibility of a certain tension between them is present.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> This phrase is repeated throughout the book as a way of referring to the early, popular expectations regarding the future (see, e.g., 44-45). Also throughout, the author is careful to distinguish the popular understanding of and hope for the future from the notion of eschatology proper, the latter of which he regards as a late development. See 20-21, and *passim*.

<sup>58</sup> Bright explains that the Sinai covenant was “based in gracious and saving actions of the Deity already performed, and it laid upon the recipients (Israel) the binding obligation to obey the divine commandments under threat of the severest penalties in the event of failure to do so” (28).

<sup>59</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 25. He goes on to note, “Both are very ancient, and both are associated with the word ‘covenant’.” The author repeatedly makes claims similar to the former one regarding the antiquity of these traditions. For Bright’s fuller treatment of election traditions in ancient Israel, see *History of Israel*, 148-157.

A number of weaknesses may be identified in Bright's treatment. The first issue relates to the nature of the author's construal of particular theological traditions and their development. Bright frequently notes that there is a built-in potential for the traditions associated with the promises of YHWH to the patriarchs as well as the unconditional election of Zion and eternal covenant with David to lead to complacency, and he suggests that this is what eventually came to pass in the period of the exile. Although he repeatedly maintains that this course of events was not inevitable, he is convinced that it must have taken place:

Though belief in these traditions need not have led to complacency with regard to the future, *it must have served to engender a certain confidence*. Those who cherished such a belief could feel assured that their God had chosen them to be his people, had promised them blessing, and intended that they should become a great nation. They could view the land they occupied – and much more besides – as Promised Land; they could see their title to it as resting in the sure promises of God to their ancestors, and their possession of it for all the future as secured by the same *unconditional promises*. A certain long-range optimism *must inevitably have resulted*.<sup>60</sup>

The problem with such reasoning should be clear: a *conjectural account* of what was likely to have happened is articulated with a rhetoric of certainty that functions to exclude any other construal of what may have happened. While this might, in theory, be understood merely as a harmless feature of overconfident scholarly rhetoric, it remains the case that in the course of Bright's argument, this paradoxically certain conjecture serves as the basis for a reconstruction of the popular beliefs about the future, derived from ancient theological traditions, that Jeremiah's opponents must have espoused. In other words, this problematic reasoning is central to the author's construal of a theological tradition that stands behind the beliefs and convictions of the people Jeremiah confronted in his temple sermon.

By contrast, it should be stressed that both the ancient traditions and the beliefs of the Judahites that are supposed to be later inheritors of them are obscured from

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<sup>60</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 28 (my emphasis); cf. 44: According to the author's reasoning, "If early Israel's understanding of her God, and of her relationship to him and position under him, was at all as we have described it, it *must have* awakened in her a remarkable openness toward the future" (my emphasis).

view within the text of the temple sermons.<sup>61</sup> Bright's construal is a classic example of what has been referred to elsewhere in critical biblical research as 'mirror-reading': a polemical or otherwise occasional text is interpreted as though it might *reflect* historical details about the particular audience and/or the particular situation that it addresses, although such details are not explicit within the text.<sup>62</sup> I contend that Bright's construal of the ancient traditions, and his mirror-reading of the temple sermon to discover an underlying conflict, ought to be regarded as one possible reading rather than what *must be* the case.

A second weakness of Bright's argument involves the problematic dichotomy that he envisions between conditional and unconditional covenantal traditions within the Old Testament. According to Bright, the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic covenants "are of markedly different types," with the former emphasizing the unconditional election and reliable promises of YHWH and the latter emphasizing the conditional dynamic presupposed by covenantal obligations.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, the traditions concerning the election of Zion and the Davidic line are understood as theological developments that must have given the nation an "unshakeable confidence" regarding their future.<sup>64</sup> He concludes:

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<sup>61</sup> I use the term 'observed' deliberately. I grant that a polemical text such as Jer. 7:1–15 is suggestive of a view to which it is counter, and that there are hints of that opposing view, especially in vv. 4 and 10; however, these hints and suggestions hardly constitute clarity with regard to what 'must have' been the case. Cf. Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> For two insightful discussions that recognize the value of this method in New Testament studies, and yet also the deeply flawed methodological tendencies associated with it, see Barclay, "Mirror-Reading Polemical Texts," and Gupta, "Mirror-Reading Moral Issues." Both Barclay and Gupta perceptively highlight the importance of recognizing varying degrees of plausibility associated with this sort of reasoning, rather than jumping to conclusions that may misrepresent the conversation or situation that is supposed to stand behind the text.

<sup>63</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 27–29, citation from 27. Bright's repeated use of terminology such as "...God's prevenient grace" to describe the basis of the Sinai covenant perhaps reveals the problematic influence of a distinctively Protestant framework through which he views the conditional Sinai covenant (cf. 29). As I maintain throughout this thesis, the inevitable influence of theological frameworks upon biblical interpretation is by no means of necessity a liability; however, such influences and presuppositions are best acknowledged and explicitly engaged so as to avoid (as far as possible) the problematic situation whereby theological biases shape construals that are presented as neutral analyses of the biblical or historical data.

<sup>64</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 72. With reference to the likely antiquity of the Zion tradition, Bright discusses a number of biblical texts that are taken to reflect YHWH's unconditional promises to both the Davidic dynasty (e.g. 2 Sam. 7; Pss. 72, 78, 89, 132) and the city and temple of Jerusalem (e.g. Pss. 46, 48, 76). Although in these latter texts, the so-called Hymns of Zion, the

Such affirmations, insofar as they were truly believed, *must have* given to the nation an enormous sense of security, an abounding confidence in the future. God has chosen Mt. Zion as his dwelling place, and he will never abandon it to its foes. Let the nation but entrust itself to this God and face the future without fear.<sup>65</sup>

On Bright's reconstruction of the situation, "As the sure promises of God to David were reaffirmed in the cult of the Temple, we may assume that the Sinaitic covenant with its stern stipulations tended to be thrust into the background."<sup>66</sup>

Going on to discuss the proto-eschatological developments within the prophetic literature of the 8<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, Bright discerns a tension between the unconditional and conditional dynamics inherited within these ancient theological traditions.<sup>67</sup> Setting the stage for his climactic chapter on the prophet Jeremiah, Bright suggests that Josiah's reform may be understood as a temporary victory of the appropriate Mosaic recognition of conditionality over the problematic notions of

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king is not mentioned, Bright notes that in them, "everywhere one sees expressed the unshakable assurance of God's presence in Zion, his chosen dwelling place, protecting his people from all danger" (68). He cites the expression of confidence in YHWH in Ps. 46:1–3 and then notes that "the ground of this confidence is Yahweh's presence in Zion, his chosen dwelling place (Ps. 76:2), the city which he has established forever (48:8). The same thought is expressed in the strange language of Ps. 46:4" (68, he follows LXX in his interpretation of this verse). Bright offers an interpretation of this verse that understands it to allude to paradisaical traditions of Gen. 2 and the world of myth. He explains, "Since God dwells on Mt. Zion, the people have nothing to fear. The nations may rage and storm, and close in on Jerusalem with fearsome power, but God intervenes and breaks them, and sends them reeling in rout" (68–69). He suggests that these notions are expressed by Pss. 46:5–11; 48:4–8 and 76:1–6.

<sup>65</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 69 (my emphasis). According to Bright, "This theology seems to have established itself early. The Zion tradition is assuredly very old, it being widely believed among scholars that it had its roots in the cult of pre-Israelite Jerusalem" (56, citing Roberts, "Davidic Origin").

<sup>66</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 73. Although in this case the author acknowledges that his reasoning is speculative, he notes that prophets such as Isaiah and Micah *seemed* to face precisely this kind of complacent attitude on the part of their contemporaries, with people disregarding law and yet retaining a strong confidence in the future. He notes that although prophets like Amos and Hosea demonstrate that the demands of the covenant were forgotten in Northern Israel no less than in Judah "the whole concept of covenant seems to have been externalized and perverted" (74).

<sup>67</sup> For example, he suggests that there is a tension evident in the prophet Isaiah between the Sinai and Davidic traditions, and that despite the rootedness of the prophet's message in the Zion tradition he remains aware of an element of conditionality (See *Covenant and Promise*, 99–103). Likewise, Bright suggests that the books of Amos and Micah demonstrate that these two different conceptions, "the one [that] stressed the sure and unconditional promises of God which nothing could cancel, the other the binding stipulations of his covenant which no one might disregard with impunity" may be held in compatible tension rather than in opposition to one another (113–114).

unconditional promise associated with the David and Zion traditions; yet, he conjectures, the reform only worked at the level of forced suppression and some external changes but never cut to the heart of the people: "It is probable, indeed, that the very fact of reform only served in the minds of many to bolster a false sense of security."<sup>68</sup> Bright thus offers a hypothetical scenario in which the people of Judah must have bought into assumptions about the reform having satisfied the requirements of the law and thus meeting the demands of the covenant, telling themselves that they could rest secure in the sure promises to David and Zion. According to Bright, "If we read Jeremiah correctly, this is what certain of the clergy were telling the people."<sup>69</sup>

Not only does the line of reasoning detailed above offer further evidence of the problematic extent of the author's conjectural 'mirror-reading', but it also illustrates pervasive assumptions running through this work regarding an inherent dichotomy between conditional and unconditional promises in Israel's earliest covenantal traditions. Although he recognizes the possibility, and even the presence, of a tension and coexistence of these dynamics within subsequent texts and traditions, Bright remains committed to the view that the Sinai tradition, with its explicitly-articulated covenantal obligations, represents a fundamentally different view of the relationship between YHWH and Israel than do the patriarchal, Davidic and Zion traditions with their "sure promises" and apparently unconditional election. However, it is by no means clear that the promises of YHWH, whether concerning the election of Israel's ancestors, the perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty, or the protection of Zion, must be understood as unconditional, irrevocable, or absolute guarantees. As argued above, such expressions of confidence in YHWH may be understood to reflect profound convictions regarding God's ability and desire to save, and may even be based upon past experiences of such deliverance, without neglecting the inherently contingent dynamics of covenantal relationship.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 136.

<sup>69</sup> Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 136.

<sup>70</sup> See Moberly's critique of interpretations of religious speech that are insufficiently attentive to the nuanced relationship between the locutionary and illocutionary force of speech-acts (*Old Testament Theology*, 121-127). Expressions of confidence in YHWH's salvation need not be understood as reflections of belief in any kind of absolute guarantee, just as threats of divine

Finally, although Bright is explicitly aware of the conceptual difficulty created by maintaining that these traditions of covenant and election should be understood as in competition with one another, and while he does note that they are not inherently incompatible, he fails to consider the extent to which they may be understood as elements of tension within the same theological tradition rather than a conflict between opposing traditions.<sup>71</sup> If it seems an oddity to Bright that such a stark contrast between perspectives on the future might coexist within the same theological tradition, then perhaps this is all the more reason to attempt to reframe the discussion of the nature of both the large-scale tradition and the particular streams of tradition that constitute it. In other words, maybe it seems strange because there is another possible, and perhaps more plausible, construal.

Although it is clear that Jeremiah's temple sermon involves a critique of deceptive words and a misplaced form of trust, the interpreter need not resort to problematic reconstructions of a conflict concerning the nature of divine presence that stands behind the text in order to understand what is at issue. The phrasing of Jer. 7:9–10 communicates a sense of incredulity at the notion that the people would engage in the immoral and idolatrous behaviors listed, and then presume to stand in the presence of YHWH in his temple (לפני בבית הזה), assured of their safety (נצלנו) despite their continued practice of abominations (כל־התועבות האלה). Such actions, and the complacent presumption attached to them, provoke the further rhetorical question of v. 11, in which YHWH suggests that his sanctuary is being treated as though it were a hideout for thieves (מֵעֵרָה פִּרְצִים). In answer to the mistaken belief that their abominations may be hidden from the deity in the context of such a hideout, YHWH proclaims that he *sees/has seen* everything that is going on (אֲנֹכִי הִנֵּה רֹאִיתִי). Taken as whole, then, this latter section of chap. 7 (vv. 8–11) seems to fill out and explicate the otherwise ambiguous v. 4 in a way that stresses the self-deceptive belief on the part of the people that they may

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judgment may be designed to elicit an altered course of action rather than functioning as a necessary prediction.

<sup>71</sup> The difference between these options is nuanced. Clearly, Bright would not deny that the conflict between Jeremiah and the popular beliefs he is supposed to denounce should be understood together as part of the broader trajectory of ancient Israelite faith; however, his emphasis upon the apparent conflict fails to do justice to the relationship between continuity and diversity within that broader tradition.

engage in all manner of idolatry and injustice and yet still enjoy the presence of YHWH in the temple (ובאתם ועמדתם לפני בבית הזה), as if he somehow cannot see what is going on. The text gives no clear indication that the deceptive words should be understood as expressions of a supposed doctrine of inviolability, and the references to the name of YHWH need not be construed as indications of a denial of YHWH's presence in the temple.<sup>72</sup>

### *Conditional and Unconditional Judgment in the Book of Jeremiah*

A second hermeneutical framework that has exercised considerable influence on the interpretation of the temple sermon is the relationship between expressions of conditional and apparently unconditional judgment. This dynamic is evident not only within chapters 7 and 26 but also throughout the book of Jeremiah as whole. At times, the prophet articulates a message that seems to envision the possibility of repentance, imploring the people to turn (שוב) and/or to change/improve (היטיבו) their conduct so as to placate YHWH and avert the coming judgment (e.g. 7:3–7; 26:3–6, 13; cf. 18:1–10; 22:1–5; 36:3); yet at other times, the message of judgment appears to take the form of an unconditional proclamation, with no explicit possibility for repentance (e.g. 7:12–15; 26: 9, 11; cf. 19:1–15), a dynamic that is perhaps given added weight by the recurrent motif of YHWH's prohibition against Jeremiah's intercession (7:16; 11:14; 14:11).

For some scholars, this ongoing tension within the final form of the book simply reflects the historical course of events that took place over the duration of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry.<sup>73</sup> That is, in the early stages there was a legitimate possibility that the nation might heed the words of YHWH's servants the prophets and change their ways, thus the Lord commissioned Jeremiah to proclaim such a message; however, in time, the lack of desired/appropriate response to this message resulted in a new situation in which YHWH regarded the covenant as decisively broken and became

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<sup>72</sup> It is certainly possible to take the reference to being safe, or delivered, in v. 10 (נצלנו) as an expression of the inviolability doctrine if one is already inclined to believe it is in view (so, Overholt, *Threat of Falsehood*, 16–18), and vv. 4, 8 similarly as “slogans of security (ibid., 67–68); yet one may also hold together the concepts of potential military threat and the danger of divine presence in the context of covenantal rebellion, without recourse to the hypothesis of an inviolability doctrine (so, Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 60–62). See further discussion in chapter four below.

<sup>73</sup> So, for example, Holt, “Jeremiah's Temple Sermon.”

committed to carrying out judgment upon his people. For others, the tension between the conditional and unconditional dynamics in the final form of the text should be understood to reflect its compositional history rather than the timeline of Jeremiah's life and ministry.<sup>74</sup> According to this latter line of reasoning, the interpreter ought to be less confident about the life of an historical prophet or the motivations of YHWH himself, and instead focus upon the likelihood that different groups responsible for the composition and transmission of the biblical text sought to highlight different elements over the course of its history and development. Thus, some interpreted Jeremiah as a preacher of unconditional doom, while others either simply understood the prophet's message differently or else sought to update and recontextualize the Jeremianic tradition by inserting a conditional perspective that would apply to a later generation.

It cannot be denied that there is a stark variation in the way that divine judgment is portrayed and the prophetic message is articulated throughout the book of Jeremiah. Moreover, it is arguably the case that the juxtaposition of these dynamics is especially pronounced in both accounts of the temple sermon. Thus, the question addressed by this section is not whether or not an element of tension or diversity is present in the text, but rather, how best to construe the nature of this tension and what kinds of hermeneutical frameworks might be adopted in order to do justice to it and understand the texts in their present form.

*Carolyn Sharp: Theological Tensions and Clashing Ideologies*

In her ambitious 2003 monograph *Prophecy and Ideology in the Book of Jeremiah* Carolyn J. Sharp seeks to combine redaction-critical and traditio-historical methodologies with ideological criticism, in an effort to understand the interrelationship between the compositional history of the book of Jeremiah and the redactional interest in the nature

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<sup>74</sup> So, for example, Thiel, *deuteronomistisch Redaktion 1–25*, 105–106) maintains that Jer. 7:3–5 and v. 13 show evidence of formulaic language that may be attributed to the Deuteronomists (cf. Hyatt, "Torah," 390–392). He argues that an announcement of doom (*Unheilsankündigung*) concerning the temple in v. 14 has been worked out (*ausgearbeitet*) by D into a specific type of sermon (*Alternativ-Predigt*) that adds a conditional dynamic (*Konditionalformulierung*) to the originally unconditional prophetic accusation (114–119). He explains, "As a result of the redaction (*Bearbeitung*) of Jeremiah's temple-word by D, the character of the latter has changed considerably" (118). Cf. the recent discussion in Maier, "Nature of Deutero-Jeremianic Texts."



of prophecy throughout the Deuteronomistic History.<sup>75</sup> Sharp offers an account of the long recognized “major tension” and “theological divide” in the book of Jeremiah by way of a reconstruction of two distinct strands of ideologically-motivated editorial activity which, despite their contradictory content and agendas, have both been retained within the canonical form of the text.<sup>76</sup> Focusing particular attention upon the motif of עבדי/ה הנבאים (“my/his [YHWH’s] servants the prophets”), the author utilizes redaction-critical and literary-critical methods in order to identify apparent inconsistencies in the text at both syntactical and theological levels, and then employs ideological criticism in order to reconstruct suggestive portraits of two distinct political groups struggling for interpretive control over the Jeremiah traditions.<sup>77</sup> The picture that emerges from her reconstruction involves “the focused and urgent clashing of two titanic ideologies,” during the aftermath of the initial deportation of 597 BCE.<sup>78</sup>

According to the author’s hypothesis, one group is based in Judah, and is convinced that the certainty of further divine judgment will entail full destruction for Judah and the rest of the world; they see the persistent rebellion of the people of Yahweh as justification for the imminent judgment and any prophet claiming peace or avoidance of this fate as illegitimate and deceptive. The other group consists of exiles residing in Babylon as a result of the first deportation, and its interpretative and editorial activity features an ideological emphasis upon the legitimacy of the Babylonian diaspora community, a favorable portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar, and the hope of restoration for a remnant of Yahweh’s people. Sharp’s reconstruction of political tensions in ancient Judah is partially dependent upon the work of Karl-

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<sup>75</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*. See the author’s comments on her own methodology, pp. xiii-xv of the introduction.

<sup>76</sup> The terminology cited here is used by the author on Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 42.

<sup>77</sup> The motif is present in 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; and 44:4 and, along with various related and complementary motifs, it forms the exegetical focus of Sharp’s analysis. The author explains that the exegetical analysis in chapters 2-4 of her monograph “will serve the heuristic goal of testing a working hypothesis: that the motif of the LORD’s servants the prophets is not simply a tired formula that has been embedded in these passages for reasons having to do with the repetitious Dtr style and a practically codified ‘Dtr understanding of prophecy,’ but may be instead a structurally significant and rhetorically important theme employed in different ways by different editorial hands” (Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 41).

<sup>78</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, xvi. This evocative language of ‘clashing’ perspectives is employed repeatedly throughout. See also 61, 95.

Friedrich Pohlmann and his interpretation of Jeremiah 24 for its plausibility.<sup>79</sup> The stark symbolic contrast of this chapter between the divine favor bestowed upon the exiled community and the rejection of King Zedekiah and those remaining in the land, forms the basis of Pohlmann's argument for a '*golah*-oriented' redaction, which is also exhibited in 21:1–10 and chaps. 37–44.<sup>80</sup> According to Sharp, "There is no question that chs. 24 and 42 explicitly privilege the status of the 597 exiles in Babylon over the status of those remaining in Palestine and those who flee to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem."<sup>81</sup>

Thus, according to Sharp's account, the juxtaposition of apparently contradictory perspectives of inevitable judgment and conditionalism within the book of Jeremiah is best explained by paying close attention to the disruptions and inconsistencies in the present form of the text, and then reconstructing an account of complex editorial activity which represents not only conflicting ideological perspectives, but also concrete political goals within the upheaval of the early 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE.<sup>82</sup> She suggests that whereas the Judah-based group was content to accept the inevitability of divine judgment, accounting for it in terms of theodicy and maintaining a posture of resistance against Babylon, the '*golah* traditionists' emphasized the conditional nature of divine judgment, indicating that authentic repentance may assuage divine wrath and prevent disaster, and promoted the cultic

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<sup>79</sup> The author acknowledges that "Pohlmann's analysis is convincing in its broad strokes, given the patent privileging of the Babylonian *gôlâ* in Jeremiah 24," yet she suggests that his thesis does not always do justice to tensions evident in latter sections of the book, such as chaps. 37–44 (Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 11).

<sup>80</sup> See Pohlmann, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch*, 16-17; 20-31; 42-44. Cf. Maier, "Nature of Deutero-Jeremianic Texts," 119-122.

<sup>81</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 90, citing in this context Pohlmann, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch*, 20-31, 123-145.

<sup>82</sup> In her own words: "a redaction-critical model informed by ideological criticism can best account for the shifts of focus and perspective evident in the passages under discussion" (42). Cf. Sharp's "Jeremiah in the Land of Aporia," in which she focuses on chap. 36, arguing that "A major conflict is submerged beneath the dominant discourse of the text. It has to do with resistance on the part of some Jeremiah traditionists to the way in which others co-opted the prophet's authority for the political agenda of the *golah* group in Babylon and disempowered other Judeans, those who wanted to defend their home against the Babylonian invaders and those who fled to relative safety in Egypt" (35).

and political authority of the Babylonian diaspora, as well as the hope of restoration for the exiled community.<sup>83</sup>

Sharp is adamant that the “large-scale theological tension between full doom and the possibility of avoidance of destruction through repentance cannot be adequately explained using synchronic analysis.”<sup>84</sup> While she recognizes that the isolated linguistic form of the עֲבָדֵי הַנְּבִאִים motif may be construed in synchronic terms as a straightforward indicator of the persistent rebellion of the people of Israel in the face of YHWH’s persistent warnings through the agency of his prophets, the author argues that close attention to the various contexts in which it is found reveals a more complicated situation: “In the broader picture, the motif seems in some cases to undergird threats of destruction for all of Judah but in other cases to threaten only certain segments of Israel and to allow for the redemption of other segments.”<sup>85</sup> Not only does she deny the legitimacy of a synchronic approach based on what she regards as irreconcilable theological tensions, but she emphasizes that an even more basic presence of literary inconcinnity discredits more holistic attempts at interpretation. Because Sharp finds a “...relatively high degree of variation in the semantic significance of the larger literary contexts in which the motif is employed,” which “coincides closely with redactional disruptions to those passages,” she maintains that diachronic analysis is necessary in order to do justice to the textual and literary evidence.<sup>86</sup>

#### *Carolyn Sharp on Jer. 7 and 26*

The two accounts of the temple sermon feature prominently in Sharp’s argument. Chapters 7 and 26 each exhibit the formulaic motif that she seeks to analyze and she finds in both texts ample evidence of her clashing ideological perspectives.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the author claims that consideration of the relationship between these two texts within

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<sup>83</sup> For further detail regarding the putative ideological and political motivations of each group, according to her argument, see *Prophecy and Ideology*, 157-159.

<sup>84</sup> Sharp, 42. The author is similarly dismissive of the potential adequacy of synchronic analysis is repeated throughout. Cf. 56, 78, 167.

<sup>85</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 43.

<sup>86</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 43-44.

<sup>87</sup> Although Sharp treats the larger passage of 7:1–8:3 (44-54), my comments will be primarily restricted to 7:1–15, given the scope of the present study.

the broader context of the עבדי הנבאים motif and Deutero-Jeremianic prose offers a more adequate model than those proposals that distinguish between the texts on formal or source-critical terms, or those that suggest a model of literary dependence.<sup>88</sup>

According to Sharp, neither attempts to discern the authentic Jeremianic kernel within these texts, subsequently overlaid by later Deuteronomic redaction, nor synchronic interpretations that focus on the final form are capable of doing justice to the tensions within them; instead, it must be acknowledged that two strands of Deutero-Jeremianic tradition are juxtaposed within the extant form of these texts, constituting evidence of the struggle between these groups over the authoritative prophetic legacy they have inherited.<sup>89</sup> In the account in chapter 7, she finds one layer of material to involve an indictment of the people of Judah for trusting in deceptive words (vv. 4, 8) and failing to heed YHWH's servants the prophets (v. 13b), leading to a proclamation of unavoidable judgment (v. 15).<sup>90</sup> Yet, according to her hypothesis,

Interwoven with this inevitable-doom perspective are distinctive additions of a notably different force that emphasize the people's lack of morality and employ concrete examples of apostasy from the contemporaneous narrative setting of the prophet (7:3, 5–7, 9–13a, 14, 17–19, 30–4; 8:1–3). This layer of material conveys a concern for morality largely absent from the first tradition, and furthermore, promises what in the larger context amounts to some sort of averting of the catastrophe should the people act in socially just ways (vv. 5–7).<sup>91</sup>

In Sharp's view, these juxtaposed strands of material may not only be disentangled from their present form, but also confidently ascribed to the plausible motivations of two political groups wrestling with questions of identity and authority during the exilic period. She explains, "The inevitable-doom view foresees the unavoidable destruction of all the earth, not just Judah; the conditional view tries wherever possible

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<sup>88</sup> See Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 2.

<sup>89</sup> See Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 45. In her own terms, "[the] theological and literary tensions in the first half of Jeremiah 7 are best explained by the postulation of the presence of two competing Deutero-Jeremianic traditions" (50, cf. 54–56).

<sup>90</sup> The author also notes that vv. 16 and 27 of chap. 7 probably also reflect this perspective, since they appear to envision the coming judgment as unavoidable. For further discussion of Sharp's dubious theory about the 'deceptive words' motif constituting a reference to heeding the wrong advisers (Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 46–47), see below.

<sup>91</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 47–48.

to reframe that so as to target those remaining in Judah after 597 (in other words, all those Judahites who are not in the Babylonian *gôlâ*).<sup>92</sup>

Likewise, in her interpretation of chapter 26, Sharp claims that in the light of ample evidence of literary tensions, “Attempts to read [Jer. 26] as a relative unity in literary terms...cannot succeed, and even a position that allows for light redaction at the end of the chapter fails to account for all of the difficulties.”<sup>93</sup> Noting the apparent syntactical awkwardness of v. 5 and what is sometimes referred to as the misquotation of the prophet by his opponents in v. 9, she again finds the tension between a conditional perspective and a message of inevitable doom to be evident within this text and suggestive of the dynamics of its compositional history.<sup>94</sup> According to Sharp, these elements constitute “traces of the full-doom view,” which has been subsequently countered by the “conditional traditionist perspective” primarily evident in vv. 10–16.<sup>95</sup> Regarding the two accounts of the temple sermon together, the author concludes:

Rather than one or another version being more historically accurate and the other being a midrashic elaboration, and rather than ch. 26 representing the same events as those reported in ch. 7 but from a biographically-motivated historiographical stance, ch. 7 initiates the ideological clash of two different perspectives on the content of Jeremiah’s message, and ch. 26 continues this clash as regards the reception of the message in the second half of the book, which is more focused on supporters and adversaries of Jeremiah. It would seem that traditionists charged with the task of preserving the tradition of Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon and its reception wrestled over the authoritative representation of that tradition all the way through the task.<sup>96</sup>

#### *A Critique of Sharp’s Thesis*

Sharp’s thesis concerns the putative ideological motivations and theo-political agendas that contributed to the compositional development of the book of Jeremiah and

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<sup>92</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 52. Although she acknowledges that paraenetic material would have been present already within the pro-Judah strand of material, Sharp maintains that for these traditionists the purpose of the exhortation did not stem from a legitimate view that repentance was still possible, but rather served a narratological and rhetorical function, highlighting that despite the prophetic warnings, the people still did not heed (see 53).

<sup>93</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 56.

<sup>94</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 55–58. I will engage in more detail with the exegetical issue of the role of these verses in the narrative in my own reading of chapter 26, in chapter five below.

<sup>95</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 58–59. Sharp tentatively suggests that vv. 17–19 seem to fit best with the “full-doom” layer of material, whereas the account of Uriah in vv. 20–23 likely belongs to a later stage of redaction than the shaping of the text according to the conditional perspective (60–61).

<sup>96</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 61.

emphasizes diversity within the development of the Jeremiah tradition, seeking to identify particular groups of “tradents” or “traditionists” who sought to present themselves as the authoritative bearers of that tradition. Her monograph has undoubtedly contributed to a movement toward greater nuance in critical accounts of the compositional history of the book, yet there are weaknesses both in her methodological convictions and her constructive thesis.

First, Sharp’s repeated assertions that synchronic analysis is inherently insufficient to account for the “irreducible” theological tensions within the book of Jeremiah are simply unhelpful. These comments appear to be based merely on the assumption that a synchronic approach is incapable of doing justice to the complexities of textual or redactional development, and on an arbitrary privileging of the dynamics of compositional history over the hermeneutical significance of the text’s canonical form.<sup>97</sup> Given the absence of any sound argument against the possibility that one might interpret Jer. 7 and 26 critically and theologically, with careful attention to both synchronic and diachronic dimensions, it remains to be seen whether such a reading might be possible and/or convincing. In contrast to her pejorative dismissal of the validity of synchronic interpretations, my own readings of both accounts of the temple sermon (in chapters four and five below) seek to engage the biblical texts primarily in their canonical form and context, while doing justice to elements of tension within the text and evidence of likely compositional and theological complexity behind it.

Second, it may be pointed out that Sharp does not quite escape the charge of circular reasoning that she is content to apply to her own interlocutors. It becomes clear as Sharp’s study progresses that she is not simply following the evidence where it leads, but rather she has come to expect to find indications of a particular form of

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<sup>97</sup> In the final pages of her study, Sharp turns to the matter of “those who find the material not only fascinating as a literary document but authoritative as sacred Scripture” (*Prophecy and Ideology*, 166). While she seems to indicate that such a posture necessitates some sense of the message of Jeremiah as a whole in its final form, the author is adamant that theological significance must not be achieved through “overwriting” or “eclipsing the richness” of the complex book, claiming that “...no synchronic reading that harmonizes the significant ideological tensions within the book will be able to illuminate its meanings without drastic skewing of at least some of the texts under consideration” (167). She goes on to argue, “In surrendering the instinct to tame, unify, and harmonize these multivocal traditions, the interpreter may discern glimpses of those sacred truths over which no ideological position – ancient or contemporary, political or hermeneutical – can exercise dominion” (169).

redactional activity which fit her hypothesis about the text as a whole and its compositional development.<sup>98</sup> While observations of apparent theological tension and literary inconcinnity work together as mutually reinforcing theories within Sharp's treatment, any particular instance of either form of 'evidence' is susceptible to alternative construals which have the potential to call into question the hypothesis as a whole.<sup>99</sup> Although her hypothesis regarding ideologically-motivated editorial activity might offer a reasonable account of how such activity might have contributed to produce the extant manuscripts upon which the Hebrew Bible is based, an alternative might nevertheless be able to set forth a plausible synchronic reading of the canonical form of the text as a coherent presentation of a narrative or of a set of motifs, and perhaps even as a form of legitimate and authoritative insight into the character of God.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> On the one hand, the author provides a compelling account of precisely the kind of ideological struggle and resultant editorial activity that *might* reasonably be ascribed to various Judahite groups vying for interpretive control over authoritative prophetic traditions as they attempted to respond to the existential, political and theological crisis posed by the tumultuous period between 597 and 587 BCE. On the other hand, her argument relies upon premises which are necessarily speculative and thus she ultimately engages in the kind of circular reasoning of which she has previously accused others. Sharp's entry into her representative texts is consistently initiated by observations of apparent textual disruptions and/or literary tensions in the final form of the material. Such observations, combined with an affirmation of the widely recognized "major tension" and "theological divide" in the book of Jeremiah, provides the impetus for her hypothetical reconstructions of the ideological and political factors motivating the groups responsible for its redaction. As hypothetical reconstructions alone, these might be considered legitimate possibilities for making sense of the text and conceiving of its history of composition; however, as the study progresses Sharp's hypothetical constructs are increasingly allowed to provide the justification for positing textual disruption or theological inconsistency in the first place.

<sup>99</sup> One might argue that, strictly speaking, there is very little *evidence* of textual disruption in the canonical form of the book of Jeremiah – that is, much of what is marshalled as evidence is in fact hypothesis based on a particular construal of the whole. Such a concept of "evidence" (e.g. the apparent lack of syntactical and conceptual fit of 26:5 in its context) is a different matter from observing the extant manuscript evidence of variant textual forms that witness to the book of Jeremiah. There is a methodological problem, I think, with simply assuming that Sharp's combination of redaction-criticism with ideological-criticism needs no defense or justification. These are very different forms of study, and the extent to which each one interacts with what is called 'evidence' needs to be thought through more carefully (see further the discussion of Childs in chapter three below).

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, William Kelly's recent critique of Sharp and Christl Maier in "Deutero-Jeremianic Language," 141-144. it might also be suggested that Sharp runs afoul of a number of the problems highlighted in Sommer's perceptive essay on the fallacies of "pseudo-historicism" in biblical criticism. Although the precise dating of particular texts is arguably not the main focus of her reconstructions, it remains the case that Sharp makes confident claims ascribing

On the one hand, the relationship between Sharp's interpretation of the two accounts of the temple sermon and my own might simply be explained as a difference in focus: whereas her interpretation emphasizes a reconstruction of compositional history and theo-political dynamics in the world behind the text, I will seek to engage with the canonical form and understand its message from a theologically-oriented perspective. Yet, on the other hand, Sharp makes striking claims concerning the potential theological generativity of the divergent theological traditions that she claims to have uncovered behind the text. Sharp concludes her study by providing an overview of the two ideological groups for which she has found evidence throughout the apparent tensions and contradictions within the Jeremianic prose material. She claims that "...the book of Jeremiah is what it is, in its final form, wholly because of the ideological tensions that catalyzed the composition of the prose material."<sup>101</sup> According to Sharp, the way in which the final form of Jeremiah retains the dialogue of competing interpretive voices rather than allowing one dominant perspective to drown out all others provides a useful model for contemporary engagement with the text, in which such refusal to "exploit hermeneutical power" by privileging one interpretive voice over another is to be commended and imitated.<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an initial reading of the two biblical texts that form the subject of the present study, and critically evaluated two of the more influential hermeneutical frameworks within which the exegetical issues raised by these texts

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particular theological perspectives to particular historical groups that are based more on assumptions about the historical period and likely motivations of various groups than on careful historical argumentation.

<sup>101</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 161. This observation leads into a brief concluding note regarding hermeneutics and the potential theological significance of the material, in which the "dynamic of engagement...constitutive of the text of Jeremiah itself" is closely related to the author's own convictions with regard to the proper handling of said text and its potential "theological generativity" in contemporary contexts (167).

<sup>102</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 168-169. In this regard, her argument is reminiscent of Walter Brueggemann's approach to OT Theology, with its emphasis on the "multivocal" nature of scripture and its insistence on allowing the theological significance of the dialogical interaction of the diverse voices (see Brueggemann [Sharp, ed.], *Disruptive Grace*). As Terence Fretheim puts it, "For Walter, theological pluralism has been canonized. The Old Testament does not offer a finished portrayal of God and neither should contemporary readers" (Brueggemann, with Sharp, *Living Countertestimony*, 154).



have been considered. I have focused attention on the work of John Bright as a representative proponent of the widely-accepted hypothesis of a theological conflict between the Jeremianic tradition and the supposed inviolability doctrine, and on Carolyn Sharp as a representative of redaction-critical construals that posit a theological tension between conditional and unconditional judgment at the level of compositional history. In the light of my critiques of these two approaches, the following chapter will argue that the interpretative issues raised by Jeremiah's temple sermon(s) might be helpfully reframed by paying closer attention to the nature of tradition. The subject of traditions that develop and interact within the world behind the text is, of course, central to many of the interpretative frameworks already considered; however, in what follows, I will suggest that the nature of tradition in the world in front of the text might also provide a valuable resource for understanding these texts and the theological concerns raised by them.



### 3. Reframing the Temple Sermon: Critical, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives on the Nature of Tradition

In the previous chapter I evaluated two influential hermeneutical paradigms that are frequently operative within the critical interpretation of Jeremiah's temple sermon, and concluded that neither the inviolability hypothesis nor theories positing a conflict between conditional and unconditional dynamics represent the most adequate framework for the interpretation of these texts. In the present chapter I propose an alternative hermeneutical framework, based in part upon a reframing of the concept of *tradition* that has been operative in each of the approaches examined thus far. I argue that although a focus upon the reconstruction of particular theological traditions and streams of tradition in relation to canonical biblical texts and their compositional histories can be, and often is, illuminating in its recognition of elements of diversity within and behind the text, the lack of a robust theological (or even philosophical) account of the nature of tradition within the discipline leads to exegetical conclusions that are problematic and of questionable value for understanding or appropriating the canonical texts in question.

In what follows I will first briefly sketch the ways in which the terminology and the concept of *tradition* is and has been invoked in traditio-historical and redaction-critical study, and suggest that these trajectories within modern biblical criticism have made use of this category and its related terminology without sufficient philosophical or theological attention to the nature of tradition. Specifically, I suggest that the weaknesses of the conventional use of the concept and terminology include: (1) an emphasis on multivocality and tension for its own sake, without sufficient attention to the canonical interrelationship between diverse elements; (2) hypothetical reconstructions that are frequently unnecessarily speculative, and unclear about the plausibility structures that suggest their value or legitimacy; (3) they engage exegetically with theological texts that originated and continue to function within robust theological traditions, without availing themselves of the philosophical and theological resources within the subsequent Jewish and Christian traditions that might assist in understanding of the nature of the kinds of traditions that they are attempting

to reconstruct. In the light of these issues, I argue that both philosophical and theological discourse on the nature of tradition provide invaluable resources for the practice of biblical scholarship with attention to theological traditions. After discussing the contributions of two scholars who constitute exceptions to this trajectory by appealing to a more robust theological account of traditions within and behind biblical literature (Benjamin Sommer, Brevard Childs), I will conclude this chapter by setting out my own proposal for reframing the concept of tradition in biblical studies, moving from a philosophical to a more explicitly theological mode.

### *The Nature of "Tradition" in Critical OT Scholarship*

Many of the interpreters of Jeremiah's temple sermon discussed above utilize elements of redaction criticism and traditio-historical research, among other methods, in their approaches to the biblical text. As has been observed in my discussion of these interpretations, the language and conceptuality of "tradition" is frequently invoked in critical biblical scholarship in reference not only to textual traditions constituted by extant manuscripts and their reconstructed *Vorlagen*, but also to theological traditions that are believed to stand behind biblical texts in oral (or preliterate) forms, and sometimes articulated explicitly within the text themselves. In addition, scholars will frequently appeal to the notion of "traditionists" or "tradents" as a way of indicating those figures and groups who are understood to be responsible for the composition and editorial development of sources or redactional layers that now make up the biblical texts in their canonical form. Thus, a considerable overlap exists between the ways in which the concept of tradition may function within tradition history proper and in methods that are more directly focused on matters of compositional history, such as redaction criticism.<sup>1</sup>

Although neither traditio-historical nor redaction-critical approaches have been exempt from methodological or hermeneutical scrutiny, there remains a noticeable lack

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<sup>1</sup> Although I refer to 'tradition history' and traditio-historical research' in a somewhat general way for the purposes of this study, I am not unaware of the blurring of boundaries between this mode of critical study and others, nor of the various forms that it takes. For a comprehensive discussion of the history of the method and the various expressions of it up to the 1970's see Knight, *Rediscovering*, esp. 21-32. For overviews of the aims and concerns of redaction criticism, see Barton, *Reading*, pp. 45-60; Floss, "Form, Source, and Redaction"; Römer, "Redaction Criticisms."

of philosophical and theological reflection on the nature of tradition, given the prominence of the concept and terminology within such discourse. Douglas Knight's monograph, *Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel* (1975), offers an in-depth study of the nature and contributions of traditio-historical research to the task of biblical interpretation and the reconstruction of Israel's theological history; however, the potential value of the philosophical and theological dynamics of *tradition* are limited to a brief mention of Gadamer in the prolegomena and a few comments on the cultural significance of tradition generally.<sup>2</sup> In a subsequent edited volume, *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament* (1977), Knight brings together an impressive group of scholars to further explore the relationship between tradition and various elements of that theological history.<sup>3</sup> Although a number of these essays do consider the nature of tradition and the traditio-historical process from more explicitly theological perspectives, it remains the case that the purpose and function of tradition history within the discipline has been predominantly limited to a descriptive account of the theological traditions of ancient Israel.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, although John van Seters and H.G.M. Williamson have each recently raised methodological questions about the phenomenon of editorial development and the reasoning associated with redaction-criticism, the focus remains primarily upon the plausibility of reconstructions in historical terms and the precision of terminology associated with the processes of compositional development.<sup>5</sup>

#### *The Role of Tradition in Traditio-Historical Research and Redaction Criticism*

Among the hallmarks of the traditio-historical method is its ambition to identify and differentiate between distinct sources, layers, and streams of theological tradition that are understood to make up the biblical text, and as well as those understood to stand

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<sup>2</sup> See Knight, *Rediscovering*, 1-2 and idem, "Traditio-Historical Criticism," 98.

<sup>3</sup> Knight, ed., *Tradition and Theology*.

<sup>4</sup> As exceptions, see especially the essays by Zimmerli ("Prophetic Proclamation and Reinterpretation," 69-100) and Gese ("Tradition and Biblical Theology," 301-326) in this volume. For another noteworthy exception that considers the nature of tradition in more hermeneutical detail, cf. Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*.

<sup>5</sup> See Van Seters, *The Edited Bible* and Williamson, "Redaction Criticism." While these methodological reevaluations are valuable in their own right, more philosophically and theologically engaged contributions to such a discussion might be in order as well.

behind the text in the form of preliterate and in literary, pre-canonical forms.<sup>6</sup>

According to Douglas Knight, the “basic assumption” underlying modern critical study of the OT, from Wellhausen and Gunkel to Noth and von Rad, “is that *the majority of our Old Testament underwent a (often lengthy and complex) process of growth in real life situations...*”<sup>7</sup> The particular contribution of traditio-historical research may be understood as both a development of and a complement to earlier critical emphases upon literary sources, smaller units of oral tradition, and processes of editorial collection and redactional development.<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand, Knight emphasizes that the method is exegetically focused upon the traditions expressed within biblical *texts*, rather than upon the notion of tradition as “a vague, amorphous entity inherited from the past, such as ways of behaving, customary practices, or basic perspectives within a lineage, group or culture.”<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, his construal of the method also gives considerable attention to the world behind the text and the circumstances of its compositional development. Knight explains, “While the traditio-historical method is designed to

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<sup>6</sup> Described in German-speaking scholarship either simply as *Traditionsgeschichte* or else as *Überlieferungsgeschichte* (i.e. ‘the study of the history of the transmission of theological traditions’), this method seeks to discover and delineate particular features of theological belief and cultic practice that have contributed to the preservation and development of various biblical texts.

<sup>7</sup> Knight, *Rediscovering*, 3 (emphasis original). Typically regarded as the pioneers of this mode of critical study of the OT, both Martin Noth and Gerhard von Rad initially developed the traditio-historical approach through analyses of the Deuteronomistic History and the Hexateuch, respectively (cf. Ollenburger, *Zion*, 14ff.). Thus, from its inception, this mode of research was focused upon the investigation of a large corpus, and an attempt to discern the various layers or traditions that gave rise to it.

<sup>8</sup> See Knight, “Traditio-Historical Criticism.” Thus, the method may be differentiated from, but also understood as built upon, Gunkel’s approach, which was focused more upon individual units of tradition and their formal characteristics; see Knight, *Rediscovering*, 3; cf. Collins, “Historical-Critical Methods,” 130–131. The approach also features considerable overlap with the concerns of source and redaction criticisms in its concern to trace the particular ways in which elements of tradition that may have existed initially in oral form were expressed in writing, preserved, and developed (see Knight, *Rediscovering*, 10: “The later redaction of primarily written materials is best considered as the domain of *Redaktionsgeschichte* and not a part of tradition history as such. However, compositional and even redactional techniques are in play also at the oral stage of combining traditions”).

<sup>9</sup> Knight, “Traditio-Historical Criticism,” 98. He relates this rather pejorative statement about the vague concept of tradition to the film *Fiddler on the Roof*, explaining that although such matters may play some role in the work of the tradition historian, they are not the primary focus (cf. Knight, *Rediscovering*, 1–2).

focus on a textual unit, it must necessarily take into consideration the social, political, economic, religious, and ideological terms of the times.”<sup>10</sup> He then follows this statement with a prescriptive account of the methodology’s objective: “The basic aim of any traditio-historical study should be to propose a plausible scenario whereby the given pericope came into existence, keyed to the traditionists and their ideologies and interests. We thereby gain a dimension of depth to the text as an end-product of a process transpiring in the context of real-life circumstances.”<sup>11</sup>

This dual focus upon extant textual traditions themselves and the process of transmission by which they have developed and been preserved is expressed in Knight’s well-known discussion of *traditio* and *traditum* within the context of what he calls “the phenomenon of verbal tradition.”<sup>12</sup> Although he distinguishes between them for heuristic purposes, Knight is careful to note that “These two aspects are obviously integrally related with each other so that the interplay between them, the effect of the one on the other, must not be underestimated.”<sup>13</sup> The former term (*traditio*) involves the means by which, and purposes for which, particular traditions seem to have been transmitted in both oral and written form.<sup>14</sup> The latter term (*traditum*) refers to the content of tradition(s) that are taken to reflect the lives of people and expressions of faith situated in ancient communities, with particular origins and features of growth

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<sup>10</sup> Knight, “Traditio-Historical Criticism,” 113.

<sup>11</sup> Knight, “Traditio-Historical Criticism,” 113; cf. 98: “The goal of the traditio-historical critic is to retrace [the] formation of the literary piece from its initial composition through its later stages of revision and to its final form in the text.” In the wake of the influence of Brevard Childs, the terminology of “final form” (98) and “depth dimension” (113) in this context is noteworthy. This may suggest the influence of Childs upon Knight’s more recent work, or else the common influence of German traditio-historical scholarship upon both figures.

<sup>12</sup> See Knight, *Rediscovering*, 5-20. Cf. 1-3 on the distinction between verbal and practical tradition as well as the way in which the ‘verbal’ category encompasses both oral and written tradition(s).

<sup>13</sup> Knight, *Rediscovering*, 5. It might be important to note that he refers to these as “general rubrics” and acknowledges the complexity involved in the phenomenon of tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Knight, *Rediscovering*, 6. Knight explains, “The central characteristic of the Israelite transmittal process from its very beginning is not a rigid, passive handing down of static traditions, but rather the recurring need felt by each generation to interpret and apply – to ‘reactualize’ (= ‘vergegenwärtigen’) – the old traditions for the present age” (5-6). He also notes that the intriguing phenomenon by which “new interpretations were often integrated into the traditions themselves was perhaps inevitable,” and he claims that this “principle of active tradition reception” is central to the work of Noth and von Rad, as well as being observable within Jewish and Christian tradition more generally (6).

and development as well as specific forms and variations associated with reception and use.<sup>15</sup>

While the concept and terminology of *tradition* may not be as overtly central to redaction-critical studies, it informs the reasoning of this method in multiple ways.<sup>16</sup> First, the motivations for editorial additions, alterations, and large-scale editions are frequently understood in connection with particular theological traditions within ancient Israel. What is construed as evidence of redactional activity is very often a combination of syntactical awkwardness or an abrupt transition in the text with some sort of hypothesis about a theological perspective that might have had a stake in making the editorial change or insertion that is being proposed. Second, the individuals and groups that are posited as the authorial agents responsible for the compositional development of a given text are frequently referred to as “tradents” or “traditionists”, thereby suggesting a close, if sometimes implicit, relationship between the evidence for editorial activity and the supposition of a theological or ideological perspective being advocated by way of such activity. Finally, over time, related redaction-critical hypotheses tend to gain a certain kind of momentum, as well as a degree of plausibility, such that the features of a particular theological perspective and influence are thought to be so recognizable that one no longer needs evidence of textual disruption to posit redactional activity; the supposed presence of the

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<sup>15</sup> See Knight, *Rediscovering*, 16-19. According to Knight, “For the tradition historian, the process of tradition growth and agglomeration is an aspect to be affirmed. It is unacceptable to devalue later additions, for they can contain not only historical information but also new interpretations of theological importance” (12). He notes that many traditions may be understood to have developed in response to some particular problem or issue within the life and faith of a community, attempting to resolve a difficulty or crisis, such as the often-discussed issue of theodicy that seems to have been a key concern for various OT traditions.

<sup>16</sup> Redaction-criticism, the English-language appropriation of the German *Redaktionsgeschichte*, may be understood as an analysis of the processes of editorial composition that are understood to have produced extant biblical documents. A redaction-critical approach to a particular biblical text might focus primarily upon the redactional layers that are presumed to make up the text itself in its canonical form, or upon historical reconstructions of the identities, motivations and ideological commitments of the editorial figures who are thought to have performed the work of redaction – or, of course, one might focus on both of these. Typically, these foci will be related, so that what is understood as *evidence* of editorial activity in the text is explained by recourse to theories about particular authorial/editorial groups that may have had reasons to perform such compositional arrangements or editorial alterations. Common features that may be reckoned as evidence of this sort include: awkward syntax; seemingly abrupt changes in speaker, tense or person, apparently incompatible themes or motifs. See Floss, “Form, Source, and Redaction,” 608-611.



perspective of that theological tradition is enough to suggest the likelihood of editorial activity or compositional influence.

As indicated above, numerous scholars have recently raised questions about the methodological assumptions and the practical outworking of redaction criticism. For example, John Van Seters laments what he regards as a tendency to invoke a *redactor* to function as a sort of *deus ex machina* that precludes serious consideration of literary difficulties within biblical texts, arguing that ancient authors and editors operated with a conservative enough impulse in relation to textual transmission so as to make common assumptions about redactional re-working highly implausible.<sup>17</sup> A nuanced analysis has recently been articulated by H.G.M. Williamson, who argues that the term “redaction” has been employed for too wide a range of phenomena and activities, and thus is perhaps too ambiguous to be helpful. Unlike Van Seters, however, Williamson is not prepared to abandon altogether the concept of editorial redaction or call into question its methodological legitimacy. Rather, he suggests that more precision and nuance should be involved in characterizing the textual evidence and the historical reconstructions based on it.

Williamson distinguishes the accumulation of various minor additions, glosses, and explanatory notes within the development of a text from what he depicts as the “larger effort to produce what effectively becomes a new work” that is more properly understood as the activity of redaction.<sup>18</sup> He explains further:

The difference between such untidy additions and the genuine work of a redactor of the book is stark, and the contrast allows us to do justice to the work of genuine redactors, thus rescuing redaction criticism from the accusation that as presently practised in some quarters it is convoluted to the point of defying belief.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, Williamson registers a plea for a more precise use of terminology in critical reconstructions of textual development. He proposes that “...terms, such as ‘gloss’, ‘*Fortschreibung*’, and ‘marginal comment’ should be reinstated” in order to account for the relatively minor-scale phenomena, whereas “Redaction should be limited to

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<sup>17</sup> See Van Seters’s comprehensive, if somewhat idiosyncratic, treatment in *The Edited Bible*. The *deus ex machina* comment comes from an earlier (1975) essay of his that he cites in the preface.

<sup>18</sup> Williamson, “Redaction Criticism,” 29; cf. 31 for more on this distinction.

<sup>19</sup> Williamson, “Redaction Criticism,” 32.

significant work on an inherited text that at least required the complete recopying of all the material, and often, even in ways that we cannot now detect, may have reworked some of that material itself.”<sup>20</sup>

### *An Initial Response*

Unsurprisingly, given the dominant trends within biblical criticism during most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these accounts of the purpose and function of tradition history and redaction criticism reflect a primary interest in descriptive reconstructions of the theological traditions of ancient Israel. To reiterate, the goal of the present study is by no means to question the legitimacy of such approaches, nor is it to challenge the fundamental convictions underlying both methodologies, namely that biblical literature was produced within the particularities of concrete historical situations and that the texts are the product of a long and complex history of growth and development. Rather, my aim is to (1) suggest an underexplored element of the theoretical basis of these methodologies, (2) reframe the discussion of traditions within a theological frame of reference, and (3) apply this reframing to the interpretation of Jeremiah 7 and 26.<sup>21</sup>

If part of the interpreter’s objective is to identify and understand the particular traditions that are expressed within biblical literature, as well as those that appear to have influenced the composition and transmission of that material across successive generations within the history of Israelite religion, it is reasonable to expect that greater *philosophical clarity* with regard to the nature and function of traditions more generally might contribute to such analyses. In addition, if one grants that there is some measure of continuity between the theological traditions that are expressed within biblical literature, and the Jewish and Christian theological traditions that are each shaped –

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<sup>20</sup> Williamson, “Redaction Criticism,” 34, but see also 27.

<sup>21</sup> On the first point, see the comparable remarks of Peterson in “Haggai-Zechariah 1–8,” 319–326. In his response to a collection of essays engaged in both traditio-historical and literary-critical analyses of Haggai and Zechariah 1–8, Peterson highlights the variety of ways in which the volume’s authors use the term “tradition” and understand its meaning, accompanied by a conspicuous absence of clarity and precision in the contributor’s definitions of the subject matter they are dealing with. Peterson suggests that while all of the authors appeal to the term and concept of a tradition, some seem to mean by this primarily the content that is being transmitted (*traditum*) and others, the process of that transmission (*traditio*).

albeit in different ways – by their relationship to this literature as authoritative scripture, then it is by no means out of the question that subsequent theological discourse on the nature of tradition and traditions might contribute to the contemporary interpreter's reconstructions and understanding of these ancient oral and literary expressions. Finally, philosophical and theological perspectives not only have the potential to contribute to the sophistication of our understanding of the nature of biblical tradition, but also may in some cases offer a useful corrective to particular exegetical judgments and overarching hermeneutical frameworks that operate within more conventional methodological trajectories.

In what follows I will suggest that this reframing offers just such a corrective to the two frameworks for understanding the temple sermon discussed above, namely the inviolability hypothesis and the conditional dynamic, as well as forming the basis for an alternative theological hermeneutic. In particular, I will argue that the relationship between diversity and continuity within contemporary modes of biblical criticism may be helpfully reframed by an explicitly theological hermeneutic that seeks to do justice to the plurality that is both apparent within the OT and also plausibly stands behind it, situating this plurality within a meaningful hermeneutical context of canon and contemporary theological tradition. Within the context of interpreting Jeremiah's temple sermon, this will be seen to challenge both the assumption that there must have existed a stark conflict between Jeremiah's own theological perspective and one of the core tenets of the Zion tradition and the belief that the relationship between conditional and apparently unconditional dynamics in these texts is best explained by a theological/ideological conflict between opposing political factions in ancient Judah.

However, before offering my own account of how the concept of tradition might be reframed from the perspective of a theological hermeneutic, I will consider the proposals of two theologically-oriented scholars of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, each of whom seeks to take seriously the hermeneutical significance of both the compositional processes related to traditions behind the biblical text and of the interpretative processes within traditions in front of the text. I will address elements in their work that I seek to build upon, as well as features that my own proposal will resist or challenge.

### *Tradition(s) and Biblical Theologies: Sommer and Childs*

One way of understanding the relationship between the aims and foci of tradition history and redaction criticism is to map them onto Knight's account of the *traditum* and the *traditio*. Whereas the former may be understood as primarily oriented toward the *content* of the tradition that has been transmitted, the latter may be regarded as highlighting elements of the *process* of that transmission. Yet, as in Knight's own formulation, such a distinction must immediately be qualified with the recognition of its heuristic value rather than an acceptance of any absolute distinction.<sup>22</sup> The overlap between these methods and their foci may also be seen in recent discussions of the phenomenon of inner-biblical interpretation, not least in the central role that the *traditio/traditum* dynamic plays in the groundbreaking work of Michael Fishbane.<sup>23</sup>

The phenomenon whereby features of verbal tradition appear to have been interpreted and re-actualized within new contexts, with subsequent interpretations themselves becoming part of the authoritative tradition, suggests a blurring of the heuristic boundaries between *traditum* and *traditio*, and also offers a rich portrait of the relationship between hermeneutics and composition. I contend that this trajectory may be extended in a more explicitly theological direction, and that this reformulation will have the potential to clarify and nuance contemporary interpretations of the theological traditions within the OT, as well as the relationships between them. From a contemporary hermeneutical perspective, giving due attention to the complexities of theological diversity and compositional development behind the text (i.e., features of *traditio*, including phenomena such as redaction and *Fortschreibung*) need not be understood to preclude comparable attention to the subject matter (i.e. the *traditum*, or *die Sache*) of the canonical text in a way that is suggestive of continuity between its ancient context of origin and the contexts of later interpreters. In other words, the recognition of a dynamic of recontextualization and a blurring of boundaries between text and interpretation occurring behind the text suggests the promise of giving close

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<sup>22</sup> Indeed, as indicated already above, there is considerable overlap between these methods and their foci, as may be seen in the emphasis on transmission in the label *Überlieferungsgeschichte*, and in the common identification of particular layers or stratum of compositional history in redaction criticism (see, e.g. Schmid's appendix in *Buchgestalten*, 433-436).

<sup>23</sup> See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*. Cf. Davis, "Critical Traditioning."

attention to how the relationship between scriptural texts and theologically-oriented interpretations might function in analogous ways.

In this chapter, thus far, I have suggested the potential value of reframing the nature of tradition within the context of critical biblical studies in conversation with constructive theological discourse. However, it must be acknowledged that such a suggestion is not entirely novel. Arguably, there have been broad precursors to such a suggestion within various aspects of theological and hermeneutical discourse during recent decades.<sup>24</sup> As discussed already in the introduction to the present study, the recent work of Benjamin Sommer involves what the author calls “dialogical biblical theology,” an approach to the critical study of the Hebrew Bible that is deliberately informed by theological discourse within the Jewish tradition, and simultaneously understands its interpretation of biblical texts to contribute constructively to Jewish thought in its contemporary forms.<sup>25</sup> In a recent monograph, Sommer exhibits and develops this hermeneutical approach through an illuminating study of the relationship between various understandings of the nature of divine revelation within Jewish tradition, from the critically-reconstructed Pentateuchal sources to modern thinkers Abraham Joshua Heschel and Franz Rosenzweig.

*Sommer on Revelation, Tradition, and Authority*

The dynamic interrelationship between theological traditions that are understood to stand behind the canonical biblical text and those that stand in front of it, receiving the text in some sense as authoritative scripture, is a central focus of Benjamin Sommer’s *Revelation & Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* (2015).<sup>26</sup> Although his methodological emphasis as a biblical critic is primarily on source-critical

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<sup>24</sup> The *ressourcement* movement of *La Nouvelle Théologie*, as well as more recent discussions concerning the theological interpretation of scripture may be understood as attempts to signal elements of continuity between pre-canonical traditions proposed by critical reconstructions and the post-canonical traditions that receive the biblical text as scripture. In addition, the widespread interest in the phenomenon of inner-biblical interpretation within Hebrew Bible scholarship may be understood to set the stage for the kind of proposal developed here.

<sup>25</sup> See Sommer, “Dialogical Biblical Theology.”

<sup>26</sup> In the first chapter I briefly discussed Sommer’s recent contribution to the hermeneutical possibility of pursuing a constructive, dialogical approach to biblical criticism and theological discourse; here, I revisit his argument in more detail for the contribution it makes to the reframing project that I am pursuing.

reconstructions rather than redaction criticism or tradition history, there is a dynamic operative within Sommer's monograph that is closely comparable to what I am suggesting in the present study: namely, that hermeneutically significant elements of continuity may be discerned between pre-canonical and postbiblical traditions as well as between the phenomenon of inner-biblical interpretation and the contemporary reception of biblical literature in both critical and confessional contexts.

The textual focus of Sommer's study is the Sinai pericope in Exod. 19-24, but his exegetical energies extend well beyond the canonical text in both directions, as it were. That is, his aim is to demonstrate that an interpretation of each of the sources that have been set into conversation with one another in their Pentateuchal context yields a plurality of theological perspectives on the dynamics of revelation and authority that is comparable to the multiplicity of perspectives on the same issues in post-biblical Jewish theological discourse. Sommer notes various elements of ambiguity and apparent paradox within a synchronic reading of the text, and then examines the various diachronic strands of the book of Exodus in an effort to discern both the plurality of voices therein and the effect of redaction upon what would become the final form.<sup>27</sup> He argues that this diachronic angle/approach reveals the extent to which the compositional history of the text exhibits a debate, or dialogue, between two models for understanding divine revelation, namely the stenographic and the participatory.

According to Sommer, stenographic theories of revelation involve a portrayal of the direct, unmediated revelation of God, infused with authority, with human beings understood as mere recipients and respondents; by contrast, in the participatory model it is possible to conceive of the biblical texts as predominantly, if not entirely, human interpretation of and response to divine revelation, without compromising the divine authority associated with them.<sup>28</sup> Following his source-critical analysis, the author goes on to explore the way in which post-biblical Jewish tradition picks up and extends the same debate as was discerned amidst the pre-canonical sources of the Pentateuch,

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<sup>27</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 30-45 (on synchronic reading) and then 45-72 (on diachronic reading). Note that this latter treatment is heavily dependent upon the so-called neo-documentary school of Pentateuchal research.

<sup>28</sup> See Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 43.

arguing that a truly Jewish reading of scripture must listen to and take into account also the later history of interpretation which comments upon the text and engages in debate amongst itself, and he notes that in the history of interpretation the same tensions and ambiguities that were uncovered in the sources reappear. According to Sommer,

What the Pentateuch presents to us is not univocality but argument, not clarity but perplexity. Its final form highlights revelation as the central theme of the Pentateuch...Yet the final form undermines our ability to truly know about the revelation with any certainty. This combination of traditions, whether by design or by its refusal to decide among its sources, both emphasizes and problematizes the lawgiving. This tendency is a hallmark of the Torah as a theological document: the Pentateuch accentuates a theme's importance even as it bewilders us with self-contradictory positions.<sup>29</sup>

Despite his interest in detailing the plurality of theological perspectives from the Pentateuchal sources to rabbinic sources and contemporary developments in Jewish thought, Sommer is unabashed in expressing his own preference for the participatory model of revelation. In his fourth chapter, he develops an argument claiming that this way of conceiving the nature of divine revelation problematizes the very concept of scripture because the textual phenomenon to which this term usually applies is really better understood as part of the tradition itself.<sup>30</sup> Within the framework of Jewish theological discourse, this is expressed as a collapsing of the distinction between Oral and Written Torah; however, Sommer is keenly aware of the comparable dynamics within Christian theology and its understanding of the relationships between scripture, tradition, revelation and authority.<sup>31</sup> In more general terms that may be incorporated into various religious expressions of the relationship between authoritative texts and interpretative communities, Sommer explains, "Scripture and

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<sup>29</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 74-75. Within this section, Sommer cites his 2009 monograph (*Bodies of God*) as a similar account of the three divergent portrayals of divine presence in the Pentateuch.

<sup>30</sup> See Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 147-187. Already in the introduction Sommer anticipates this argument: "This approach implies that for Judaism there really is no such thing as scripture; there is only tradition" (8). Although he acknowledges how radical and disruptive such a claim might seem, he maintains that it need not be understood this way; rather, he suggests that it helps defend Jewish tradition against modern attacks.

<sup>31</sup> See especially the discussion on 147-161 in Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*.

tradition are not parallel; rather, scripture is but one form of the larger entity that is tradition.”<sup>32</sup>

According to Sommer, this blurring of boundaries is not only represented within the context of post-biblical Jewish theological reflection upon the nature of the Bible and its interpretation, but also corresponds to the dynamics of the compositional history of the Bible itself. He explains:

The distinction between a flexible oral tradition and a fixed written scripture is foreign to biblical texts and the culture that produced them. Scripture emerged from tradition and was often subject to modification on the basis of tradition. Consequently, eliminating the distinction between Oral and Written Torah is loyal not only to significant elements within rabbinic Judaism but to biblical religion as well.<sup>33</sup>

Sommer goes on to argue that even the distinction between reading and writing that one might take for granted in a modern context would have been very differently understood in the contexts in which biblical literature was produced. The authors of this material “were at once readers and writers; more precisely, they were writers through being readers.”<sup>34</sup> In his view, the interrelationship of such authorial and interpretative practices was such that commentary and revision, allusion and citation, as well as ongoing debate was part of the compositional process itself. Thus, “Biblical authors bequeathed their successors not only a text but also ways of relating to that text.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 156. In an endnote (328, n. 52), he asserts that Congar makes the same claim from the perspective of Roman Catholic theology (cf. Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 13).

<sup>33</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 161. He goes on to say, “This becomes clear in several distinct ways: from the study of inner-biblical exegesis, from the study of the composition and crystallization of the Bible, from the ways the Bible itself uses the term *torah*, and from the nature of scribal practice in biblical Israel and the ancient Near East.” Each of these elements is then fleshed out in the ensuing discussion.

<sup>34</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 163. On this point, cf. Levin, *Rereading the Scriptures*.

<sup>35</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 164. He goes on to explain how integral the work of modern biblical criticism has been to the realization of this portrait of ancient compositional approaches and thus in “breaking down the artificial distinction between scripture and tradition: rather than speaking of early written traditions that are subject to later interpretations, we need to speak of an ongoing dialectic between scripture and tradition in ancient Israel. Through this dialectic, tradition created scriptures; the new scriptures required interpretation; the new interpretations were passed on, becoming traditions in their own right; some of these traditions became scripture” (166).



On the one hand, Sommer's illuminating study corresponds to a significant degree with both the hermeneutical orientation of the present study and the way in which I am seeking to reframe some of the central interpretative issues associated with Jeremiah's temple sermon. In the preface to the book, he explains that two of his primary objectives are to demonstrate to theologians the value of close readings of biblical texts in their ANE context, and also, "to demonstrate to my colleagues in the guild of biblical studies that sensitivity to the concerns of later religious thinkers enriches our understanding of the biblical texts themselves."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Sommer's dialogical approach to biblical theology from a Jewish perspective is grounded both in an awareness of the dynamic interrelationship between texts and traditions within the compositional history that produced the Hebrew Bible (i.e. behind the text) and also in a commitment to the analogous dynamic interrelationship between the canonical text and later Jewish tradition (i.e. in front of the text).<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, there are elements of his treatment that may not be easily appropriated in the context of the present study for various reasons. Although Sommer certainly provides a more conceptually nuanced and theologically engaged account of tradition than what is on offer in conventional modes of biblical criticism, there are (at least) two issues that arise from his treatment that I will attempt to frame in slightly different ways for the present discussion.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, ix. He limits his focus to Rosenzweig and Heschel as representative Jewish scholars/theologians and to the Sinai traditions in the Hebrew Bible in his effort to suggest "that interaction between biblical scholarship and theology will be fruitful for both." Thus, although he is not short on careful attention to the interpretation of biblical texts within their context of origin, Sommer insists that subsequent theological developments have potential hermeneutical significance for interpretation as well. Drawing upon David Brown, Yves Congar and Wilfred Cantwell Smith he suggests that "It is the very nature of scripture that it illuminates crucial matters for later audiences in ways the first authors and audiences did not foresee" (98).

<sup>37</sup> He cites a discussion by Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) on how this kind of phenomenon should be expected in scripture because of the nature of re-appropriation and recontextualization that is involved in its compositional, literary development (Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 97-98).

<sup>38</sup> Note that when he does interact with Christian scholars on the nature of tradition, these are predominantly systematic theologians rather than biblical scholars (e.g. Avery Cardinal Dulles, Yves Congar, David Brown).

First, whereas I enthusiastically concur with Sommer's conviction that biblical criticism and constructive theological discourse may be brought into dialogical and mutually informing contact, I am less convinced by his overt commitment to the particular source-critical reconstructions of the neo-documentarian approach to the Pentateuch.<sup>39</sup> In an endnote, Sommer explains that he seeks to counter a common fallacy, one especially common among "theologically and literarily inclined readers," according to which compositional criticism is inherently destructive in that it undermines the coherence of biblical texts. In contrast to this view, he argues that "Compositional criticism attempts to find harmonious, complete, integrated literary works that our biblical texts encompass."<sup>40</sup> In my view, however, the goal of demonstrating that compositional criticism may be compatible with constructive theological discourse can lead to an acceptance of particular critical reconstructions that do not represent the only way – nor always the best way – of doing justice to the biblical text.<sup>41</sup>

Sommer claims that his reading of the Sinai pericope has highlighted the relative narrative and thematic unity and consistency of the Pentateuchal sources when

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<sup>39</sup> On recent developments in Pentateuchal research, many of which seek to re-assert and update the documentary approach to delineating its sources, see Dozeman et al., eds., *The Pentateuch*, and Gertz et al., eds., *Formation of the Pentateuch*. While the intricacies of contemporary Pentateuchal research lie well beyond both the scope of this thesis, a methodological comment is nevertheless appropriate here.

<sup>40</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 254, n. 5. He explicitly aligns himself with Barton's *Nature* (43-44), as well as Enns (*Inspiration*, 107) and Sharp (*Wrestling*, 45-75, esp. 49) in arguing that the goal of compositional criticism is aimed at recovering coherence by reconstructing underlying sources, documents. He explains: "This goal is achieved especially by the earliest Documentary critics in the nineteenth century and by the neo-Documentary school of contemporary scholars such as Baruch Schwartz and his students" (254, n. 5). Unfortunately, in the pursuit of his understandable goal to demonstrate "that it is precisely when we respect biblical texts enough to go through the labor of re-creating their original contexts that they emerge as religiously relevant to modern readers" (p. 3), Sommer sometimes ends up pitting the concept of a final form of the text against compositional reconstructions in a way that is unhelpful.

<sup>41</sup> Sommer does admit that there is some tension between his own practice of critical interpretation and that of other biblical scholars. He notes that historical criticism is often so interested in finding and exposing diversity precisely at the expense of what used to be perceived as the unity of the Bible, and that this kind of deconstructive work is very often one of the goals of such study. "But my use of historical criticism focuses on continuity in Jewish culture from the Bible onward...If we are willing to pay the price of losing the Bible's binding, we will be more than amply rewarded by a renewed ability to see the essential unity of scripture and tradition" (25).

compared with the disarray of the final form of the Pentateuch.<sup>42</sup> In my view, however, this amounts to little more than a tautological claim within a hermeneutical paradigm that has already posited the existence of putative sources within an extant text by separating strands according to criteria such as narrative unity and thematic correlation.<sup>43</sup> In other words, Sommer's affirmation of unity or coherence within a particular source is dependent upon a construal of that source over against its inclusion in the canonical form, and such a construal was initially shaped by apparent elements of agreement or coherence between discrete sections. I suggest that such reasoning, not only in source-critical but also in traditio-historical and redaction-critical study, has a tendency to lead to problematic construals of flattened, monolithic theological/ideological perspectives that are in apparent conflict or tension with one another. By contrast, in many cases a more plausible and reliable account might be to construe the extant text as reflecting a degree of nuance and depth in a way that cannot simply be reduced to its supposed multivocal origins.

The concept of *emplotment*, as developed within the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, may be illuminating in this regard. Ricoeur uses this term to give an account of the way in which particular events or experiences are given meaning by virtue of their function as components within a plot that serves as a narrative context for their ordering and relation to one another.<sup>44</sup> If the meaning of particular component parts is, to some extent, dependent upon the plot in which they are understood to be situated, then it is conceivable that what might be construed as tension or conflict *between* distinct sources that each have their own perspective may instead be understood as tension *within* a single source, more broadly conceived. That what is envisaged as a tension *between* X and Y might plausibly be understood instead as a tension *within* Z does not preclude the possibility that X and Y might still be understood as parts of Z and might exhibit a

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<sup>42</sup> See Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 73.

<sup>43</sup> Compare my critique of Sharp's arguments in the previous chapter.

<sup>44</sup> See Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 31-51. Ricoeur derives this concept from Aristotle, and develops it in a number of ways throughout his corpus. Recently, Bodner has also drawn upon Ricoeur's notion of *emplotment* in the course of his compelling interpretation of an episode that apparently occurs twice in the book of Jeremiah, in 39:11-14 and 40:1-6 (see *After the Invasion*, 3-4, 23-27).

legitimate tension between them, but the relationship between the streams of tradition needs to be understood within the context of the large-scale tradition.<sup>45</sup>

Second, I am unsure about how useful Sommer's account of the relationship between scripture and tradition may be for theology or for biblical criticism from an explicitly Christian frame of reference.<sup>46</sup> While there is much that is compelling in his appeal to the blurring of boundaries between scripture and tradition, so as to understand the former as a part of the latter, it seems to me that there still needs to be a robust account of what constitutes the tradition and where its boundaries lie in relation to the tension between elements of diversity and continuity, plurality and coherence.<sup>47</sup> The concept of tension or diversity within a tradition must have a clear sense of boundaries or else eventually the components will cease to be understood as part of the same tradition. Thus, drawing upon comments made by Dennis Olson during a panel review of Sommer's book at SBL, I suggest that Sommer's approach would benefit from greater attention to the hermeneutical significance of canon. As Olson put the question to Sommer,

Is not a significant voice lost in the Pentateuch if you focus on the separate sources of J, E, D and P (which is in itself a legitimate enterprise) but then refuse to include within the tent of Oral Torah meanings that might arise from textual decisions of later Jewish biblical communities who 'ultimately determined' the definitive shape of the Pentateuch through its editing, receiving, and then

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<sup>45</sup> This point might even be supported by Sommer's own incisive critique of methodologically problematic tendencies in Pentateuchal criticism (see Sommer, "Dating Pentateuchal Texts"). If, according to Ricoeur's notion of *emplotment*, what is understood as a tension between sources or traditions may also – or instead – be understood as a tension within a source or a tradition, then it might be suggested that Sommer commits some of the fallacies that he calls out in other scholars (although he tends to be less concerned with dating the texts and more with describing their supposedly distinct theological views). That is, he is perhaps too quick to assign to a particular source or stream of tradition theological perspectives that might alternatively be understood as nuanced features of the tradition as a whole, or even as perennial features of religious understanding.

<sup>46</sup> Although it is possible that my resistance to Sommer's approach on this point merely reflects a fundamental difference between Christian and Jewish approaches to biblical interpretation and theological discourse, there are elements of his thesis that are so closely related to my own hermeneutical proposal that it is worth considering at what points I will resist his approach.

<sup>47</sup> Chapman "Canon Debate," likewise suggests a blurring of boundaries, but without the elimination of distinctions that is ultimately proposed by Sommer. Building upon the work of Childs and James Sanders, Chapman develops the notion of a *core canon* involving an account of Israel's traditions both shaping and being shaped by the community (see "Canon Debate," esp. 279).

passing on of these biblical traditions in their final or near final form? Why is the voice of these biblical era Jewish communities excluded?<sup>48</sup>

To put things slightly differently, the reality of a final, canonical form of biblical texts in both the Jewish Bible and the Christian OT suggests that regardless of the extent to which theological diversity, tensions, and disagreements may have been a feature of the process of their compositional development, an undeniably valuable commentary upon the relationship between those elements of diversity exists in the decision to combine them in canonical form and in the traditions that received them as scripture. Surely this voice is important within the broad conception of the conversation that Sommer envisages, despite his interest in blurring the boundaries between oral and written Torah.<sup>49</sup>

Sommer's engaging and illuminating study constitutes a welcome exception to the lack of attention to the theological dynamics of tradition within the context of biblical criticism; however, in the light of the limitations discussed above I will now contrast Sommer's approach with that of Brevard Childs in order to suggest ways in which I still wish to push the conversation further from the perspective of the Christian tradition.

*Brevard Childs on Depth, Redaction, and Tradition*

Although Sommer's book does feature some engagement with the work of Brevard Childs, this is limited mainly to his discussion of canon and the differentiation between his own account of the theological value of source-critical reconstructions and those approaches that place an emphasis on the hermeneutical significance of the canonical, or final, form for the sake of meaningful theological reflection. The main discussion of Childs in *Revelation & Authority* occurs in the fourth chapter, where Sommer critiques

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<sup>48</sup> From Olson, "Review of Sommer" (unpublished paper read in the 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture' program unit, SBL Annual Meeting San Antonio, November 20, 2016).

<sup>49</sup> In this regard, the concept of 'emergence' in recent interdisciplinary research might be illuminating. If one recognizes that previously discrete source-texts have been collected in canonical form and continue to be regarded as scripture, then by this phenomenon of use (not to mention the divine agency many would hold to be involved), they have become something that they would not and cannot be simply by being placed alongside one another as an anthology. In other words, regardless of the plausible form(s) of its pre-existence as diverse documents from the ANE, the existence of this material as canonical text is a phenomenon that makes the text no longer reducible to its prior component parts, without compromising the conviction that it actually does exist as a canonical text.

both Childs and Franz Rosenzweig for their shared assumption that the final, canonical form of the biblical text is somehow preferable, or should have priority, for theological reflection relative to the components and/or stages of its compositional history.<sup>50</sup> While he by no means contributes to the problematic misreading and misunderstanding that has affected the reception of Childs in recent decades, it is possible that more overlap exists between their approaches than one might gather from reading Sommer's work.<sup>51</sup> I suggest that, on the one hand, there is considerable affinity between Childs's approach and Sommer's attempt to reconsider how to relate scripture and tradition (or, perhaps, divine and human agency within an account of revelation and interpretation); yet, on the other hand, there remain significant points of differentiation between the theological and hermeneutical commitments of these two scholars and their efforts to articulate a critically-engaged form of biblical theology.<sup>52</sup>

In an essay entitled "Retrospective Reading of the Old Testament Prophets" (1996), Childs provides a nuanced account of the various techniques associated with the critical study of textual development in the OT, giving careful attention to the methodological and hermeneutical issues at stake. He gives no hint of a desire to deny or bypass the presence of editorial phenomena within the compositional history and development of biblical literature; rather, Childs simply contends that some techniques do justice to the theological context in which, and the religious purposes for which, such development took place in a way that others do not.<sup>53</sup> Commenting upon the compositional history of the book of Isaiah, he explains,

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<sup>50</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 227-233.

<sup>51</sup> Childs's contribution has frequently been misunderstood and dismissed as if it adopts a simplistic and arbitrary preference for the 'final form', thus bypassing or ignoring the depth dimension, or in allowing the concept of canon to simply 'trump' historical or critical issues in a way that doesn't take these latter elements seriously. However, Daniel Driver (see *Brevard Childs*) has provided an authoritative and compelling corrective to many of the problematic elements of Childs's reception that have encouraged such misreading and dismissiveness, by offering a sympathetic but critical reading of Childs's corpus and relating his work explicitly to many of his critics and contemporaries.

<sup>52</sup> Other efforts to reconceive the relationship between scripture and tradition from a Protestant perspective, in relation the critical study of the OT and its compositional history, that might be brought into fruitful conversation with Sommer include: Chapman, "Reclaiming Inspiration," and Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 26-30.

<sup>53</sup> At one point, he criticizes Alec Motyer (1993) as an example of "conservative attempts to deny completely the presence of redactional extension...in the book of Isaiah," that Childs finds to be "highly unconvincing" (372).

Surely no one seriously doubts that there are major tensions within II Isaiah...Few wish to return to a traditional interpretation which would flatten tensions by means of dogmatic rubrics. Likewise the recent appeals to synchronic, post-modern readings fail to do justice to the text's depth dimensions and diverse literary contours. Nevertheless, *the crucial exegetical task remains how skillfully to handle the very different kinds of tension present.*<sup>54</sup>

According to Childs, recognition of elements of tension within a biblical book is by no means inappropriate or out of bounds within a theologically-oriented approach; yet neither does it represent – on its own – a sophisticated hermeneutical engagement with the text. Faced with evidence of tension, the crucial interpretative question becomes not merely whether to acknowledge fragmentation or attempt to smooth over the difficulties, but rather how the evidence of compositional development may be understood to relate to what he calls “the inner logic of Scripture’s textual authority.”<sup>55</sup>

In his evaluation of the possible ways in which one might give an account of the “multilayered” nature of the OT text, Childs distinguishes between various phenomena associated with compositional growth, including adaptation, *Fortschreibung*, and editorial redaction. He then moves to discuss the ways in which the critical interpreter’s handling of evidence of such phenomena have been understood in the development of the redaction-critical approach, drawing an important distinction between Zimmerli’s early formulation of the concept of *Fortschreibung* and more recent approaches that he refers to as “retrospective redactional criticism.”<sup>56</sup> In Childs’s view, whereas the former arose out of an attempt to clarify the text and emphasized elements of theological continuity, these dynamics were increasingly abandoned as retrospective techniques such as “etiology” and *vaticinium ex eventu* rose to prominence.<sup>57</sup> He explains that over time these techniques became “firmly joined to form a comprehensive theory for reconstructing literary development,” and that this approach has “increasingly...become the hallmark of redaction-criticism.”<sup>58</sup> He concludes, “This understanding of interpretive expansion is quite the opposite from *Fortschreibung*

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<sup>54</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 369 (my emphasis).

<sup>55</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 376. According to Driver, in the context of making explicit reference to this essay and this language, “To understand what Childs means here is to understand his entire project” (Driver, *Brevard Childs*, 101).

<sup>56</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 372. Cf. Zimmerli’s “Das Phänomen der ‘Fortschreibung.’”

<sup>57</sup> See Childs, 365-367.

<sup>58</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 371-372.

which described the expansion as a secondary growth on a core tradition. By reversing the direction of the main force of growth, Israel's history has become a literary construct without genuine historical rootage."<sup>59</sup>

According to Childs, there is value not only in clearly differentiating between various phenomena related to the compositional history of biblical texts, but also in evaluating the hermeneutical implications of various techniques associated with identifying and reconstructing those phenomena.<sup>60</sup> He argues that Zimmerli's original formulation of the concept of *Fortschreibung*, by emphasizing the growth and development of a text grounded in a core tradition, took both theology and history seriously in a way that more recent developments in redaction criticism do not. By contrast, he maintains that the reversal of the direction within the "etiological reconstruction" model involves "several serious exegetical implications," including: (1) a problematic and speculative approach to dating texts in which "[t]he cause is shaped by the effect, not the effect by the cause"; (2) a "massive demythologizing," of Israel's scriptures, whereby "the influence of Israel's religious faith on the shaping of the prophetic corpus has been largely subordinated to political, economic, and social factors which are deemed to be the only real forces at work in the world"; and (3) a similarly reductive account of Israel's response to divine revelation, which is "now rendered into ideological constructs of editors whose agenda is largely determined by wishful thinking or self-interest."<sup>61</sup>

In a final section of the essay, Childs turns more directly to the hermeneutical issues at stake in his discussion of methodology, suggesting that the key issue is "how

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<sup>59</sup> Childs, 372.

<sup>60</sup> In this regard, Childs's essay anticipates some of the methodological concerns highlighted in Williamson's more recent essay (discussed above). Not unlike Williamson, Childs wants to reserve the term 'redaction' for large-scale, systematic activity applied to whole books or corpora, while various other terms may be more accurately applied to elements of expansion, recontextualization and editorial layering within smaller units of text. Yet, arguably, Childs engages directly with the hermeneutical and theological implications of this discussion in a way that is considerably less pronounced in Williamson's essay.

<sup>61</sup> See Childs, "Retrospective Reading," 372. Regarding the second of these three points, Childs cites the work of Gottwald as an especially acute case of construing "theological language as only a heuristic cover for the real forces at work which are always sociological." However, there is some question as to whether such a formulation is fair to Gottwald's own understanding of his approach (see, e.g. Gottwald, "Social Matrix"). For similar concerns, cf. Chapman, *Law and Prophets*, esp. 71-110.



redactional extensions, especially in the form of retrospective techniques, are to be understood and properly interpreted within the prophetic corpus.”<sup>62</sup> First, he insists on relating an account of divine agency in connection with the phenomenon of editorial redaction, claiming that “prophetic eschatology is not an unmediated derivative of empirical history, but of a different order of divine intervention which is only dialectically related to temporal sequence.”<sup>63</sup>

Second, he argues that in the light of the relationship between divine intervention and prophetic experience, one should not expect within prophetic discourse the same kind of coherence or conceptual consistency that one might find in abstract theological essays. Because “the prophets bear witness to a divine reality” there is a sense of encounter and particularity to their portrayal, and their speech is couched in “a great variety of different forms, styles, and images.”<sup>64</sup> He explains further,

The implications from this biblical perspective is [*sic*] that too much weight cannot be assigned to logical inconsistencies or to conceptual tensions within a given passage as a means by which to reconstruct unified literary redactions. Because the nature of prophetic speech was to reflect an encounter with the reality of God, an analysis of a prophetic oracle as if it were simply a freely composed literary construct does not do justice to the material.<sup>65</sup>

Third, Childs emphasizes the hermeneutical significance of prophetic authority, claiming that “The prophetic text is not a creation of nameless editors to manipulate for a private agenda, but it remains the irreplaceable vehicle in the service of God for the sake of Israel.”<sup>66</sup> He goes on to explain that he is not opposed to viewing certain techniques of historical retrojection as having likely taken place in the development of prophetic texts, but he wants to resist construing these as “an attempt...to buttress a

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<sup>62</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 373.

<sup>63</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 374. In his view, “mere historicism” will never be an adequate approach to understanding the text.

<sup>64</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 374.

<sup>65</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 375. Compare the thesis of Tiemeyer in *Zechariah and His Visions*, namely that if one adopts the hypothesis that a prophet actually had the visionary experiences that he reports, then this has a significant effect upon the degree to which the interpreter expects to find coherence and logical consistency within the vision reports as a genre.

<sup>66</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 375. Of course, such a theological conviction will not be shared by all interpreters; however, as has been emphasized throughout this study, contestable and tradition-dependent judgments are made by all interpreters.

failing prophetic authority,” and instead take seriously the notion of theological truth as a meaningful interpretative category.<sup>67</sup> He argues additionally that the phenomenon of intertextuality may assist in understanding how the biblical text functions as a “trident of prophetic authority” in this way:

A prophetic text is specific and concrete, yet its imagery continues to reverberate within the tradition. It continues to exert a coercion on future generations of recipients and gives evidence of its force in the way in which a text is repeatedly actualized to remain highly existential even in changing historical contexts. This echoing effect arises from a widespread conviction that the authority of a single text extends to the larger story and partakes of the selfsame reality. By means of intertextuality a text can be extended into the future by means of *Fortschreibung* or it can be retrojected into the past by expanding and enriching the earlier imagery from the content of later events. Both redactional movements employing intertextuality rest on the same inner logic of Scripture’s textual authority.<sup>68</sup>

Fourth, and finally, Childs makes clear that he is well aware of the slipperiness of the terminology and concept of a “*final form*,” yet he claims that the real hermeneutical issue at stake is not the extent to which this designation may be understood to refer to anything other than an ideal construct, nor is it about the relationship or even “debate” between synchronic and diachronic approaches; rather, the crucial issue is “determining the nature of this set of writings.”<sup>69</sup> Childs argues that although there is no doubt that the movement from the historical experiences of Israel to the textual witness involved “a long period of collection, transmission, and growth,” there can also be no doubt that at some point “a process of stabilization of the tradition” took place.<sup>70</sup> He explains, “In a word, a larger structure was imposed on this material which formed the distinct parts into a loosely ordered whole.”<sup>71</sup> If an interpreter stands within one of the traditions that have construed, authorized, and received these texts as canonical scripture, then one cannot deny or avoid understanding them in this way regardless of the complexity of their growth and development in prior stages:

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<sup>67</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 375. In other words, it is possible that prophetic discourse involves the claiming and confirmation of truth, and does not *merely* have to do with advancing a particular ideology.

<sup>68</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 376.

<sup>69</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 376.

<sup>70</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 376. In his view, this point in time should be understood as roughly the Hellenistic period.

<sup>71</sup> Childs, “Retrospective Reading,” 376-377.

Regardless of the ability of critical research to unearth earlier stages lying beneath the present form of the text, interpretation of this entity received by Israel *as Scripture* must ultimately focus its attention on the received form. Of course, these writings can always be read as an ancient Near Eastern fragment, *but it is not the Bible that is being interpreted*. Similarly, the interpretation of the Old Testament is seriously impaired if critical literary analysis assigns to reconstructed redactional layers the decisive semantic role in construing the text's meaning.<sup>72</sup>

In contrast to persistent caricatures of Childs's project as an arbitrary privileging of the final form in deliberate ignorance of compositional history and complexity, it is clear that he sought to do justice both to the "depth dimension" of the biblical text and the hermeneutical significance of its canonical form. In this essay, Childs argues that alongside the recognition of literary tensions that bear evidence of editorial development and expansion, there remain elements of theological continuity, grounded both in the witness of Israel to her experience of God and in the stabilization process that resulted in a canonical form now received as scripture. If the theological traditions of ancient Israel contain evidence of growth and development in light of the compositional histories of the biblical texts, they also exhibit crucial elements of theological continuity that need to be taken seriously.

In an earlier publication, Childs discusses the relationship between his development of a canonical approach and the traditio-historical methodology that was central to his training. In *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* he explains,

It is a basic tenet of the canonical approach that one reflects theologically on the text as it has been received and shaped. Yet the emphasis on the normative status of the canonical text is not a denial of the significance of the canonical process which formed the text. The frequently expressed contrast between a 'static' canonical text and a 'dynamic' tradition-historical process badly misconstrues the issue. Similarly, to claim that attention to canon elevated one specific historical response to a dogmatic principle utterly fails to grasp the function of canon. Rather, the basic problem turns on *the relationship between text and process*. The final canonical literature reflects a long history of development in which the received tradition was selected, transmitted and shaped by hundreds of decisions. This process of construing its religious tradition involved a continual critical evaluation of historical options which were available to Israel and a transformation of its received tradition toward certain theological goals. That the final form of the biblical text has preserved so much from the earlier stages of Israel's theological reflection is fully evident. However, *the various elements have*

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<sup>72</sup> Childs, "Retrospective Reading," 377, my emphasis.

*been so fused as to resist easy diachronic reconstructions which fracture the witness of the whole.*<sup>73</sup>

Reflecting on the distinctiveness of this approach within the discipline of critical scholarship he goes on to explain, "The controversy with the tradition-historical critics is not over the theological significance of a depth dimension of the tradition. Rather the issue turns on whether or not features within the tradition which have been subordinated, modified or placed in the distant background of the text can be interpreted apart from the role assigned to them in the final form..."<sup>74</sup>

For Childs, this commitment to doing justice to the theological traditions that stand behind the text, reflected in both its final form and its compositional history, is interrelated with an awareness of the hermeneutical significance of the theological traditions that shape interpreters themselves. He explains, "The canonical approach to Old Testament theology rejects a method which is unaware of its own time-conditioned quality and which is confident in its ability to stand outside, above and over against the received tradition in adjudicating the truth or lack of truth in the biblical material according to its own criteria..."<sup>75</sup> According to Childs, "One of the hallmarks of the modern study of the Bible, which is one of the important legacies of the Enlightenment, is the recognition of the time-conditioned quality of both the form and the content of scripture."<sup>76</sup> Yet, what is seldom recognized in more exclusively descriptive modes of biblical criticism or biblical theology is that this time-conditioned quality of the scriptural text is equally true of the situation of the contemporary interpreter as well. In Childs's view:

...to take seriously a canonical approach is also to recognize the time-conditioned quality of the modern, post-Enlightenment Christian whose context is just as historically moored as any of his [*sic*] predecessors. One of the disastrous legacies of the Enlightenment was the new confidence of standing outside the stream of time and with clear rationality being able to distinguish truth from error, light from darkness.<sup>77</sup>

In contrast to this characteristically modern epistemological confidence, Childs emphasizes the particularity of both canon as tradition and of interpreter as tradition-

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<sup>73</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 11 (my emphasis).

<sup>74</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 12.

<sup>76</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 13.

<sup>77</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 14.

dependent; the former is a particular form of testimony, and the latter seeks to respond in particular, historically contingent ways. The time-conditioned quality of both the tradition to which the text bears witness and the tradition in which the interpreter stands suggests a profound continuity between the inspired text and the religious believer who seeks illumination in her reception and appropriation of it. In addition, the role of epistemic humility is implied in the recognition that there is no tradition-independent posture from which to guarantee that one has discovered or fully-grasped *the* meaning of God's revelation. In other words, "There is no one hermeneutical key for unlocking the biblical message."<sup>78</sup>

*Evaluation of Childs, Comparison with Sommer*

Given his focus upon articulating and exemplifying a specifically Jewish form of biblical theology, it is understandable that Sommer does not engage at length with the work of Childs; however, given the extent to which both scholars are focused upon the relationship between the traditions that have given rise to the canonical scriptures of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the traditions for which they function as scripture, it would seem that a more sustained exploration of both the overlap and the distinctions between their approaches would be profitable. The current discussion constitutes one small effort toward that goal.

Sommer frames the distinction between his own dialogical approach and the 'canonical criticism' of Childs and his followers as a matter of whether the religious relevance of scripture is limited to the unity of its final form, or else may also be found within the sources and compositional strata reconstructed by diachronic methods.<sup>79</sup> He stresses that the quest for a center, or for unity, might be quite appropriate for Protestant approaches to scripture, but remains somewhat extraneous, or irrelevant, for Jewish, Catholic and Orthodox approaches, which "emphasize the authoritative status of tradition alongside or even more than that of scripture."<sup>80</sup> However, it would seem from the above discussion that the crux of the matter for Childs has less to do with the

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<sup>78</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 15.

<sup>79</sup> See Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 228-230.

<sup>80</sup> Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 230. See also his immediately preceding discussion of "centripetal" and "centrifugal" reading strategies (218-227).

concept or apparent existence of unity than with a decision to give hermeneutical priority to the canonical form of the text rather than allowing this to be overwhelmed by diachronic analysis of its compositional history. He is concerned with how the text and the process of its compositional development relate to one another, and with the unavoidable hermeneutical impact that the existence of the former has upon one's understanding of the significance of the latter. In other words, Childs is not primarily interested in emphasizing the unity and coherence of the canonical, final form of biblical texts *over against* elements of tension or diversity within their extant forms or their histories of development; rather, he stresses time and again that his project seeks to understand and articulate something of the *relationship between* tensions and continuity, extant texts and the processes by which they came into being.

Of course, it remains possible that the differences between Sommer and Childs primarily stem from the distinct ways in which the relationship between scripture and tradition has tended to be construed within Jewish and Christian theology, respectively. However, it remains the case that both of these religions must wrestle with the hermeneutical relationship between an apparent plurality of diverse traditions that developed in various ways over time and a relatively stable canonical collection that came into existence, prompting subsequent interpretation and engagement within the tradition. I suggest that Sommer's construal of Childs as primarily driven by a characteristically Protestant concern for unity obscures the extent to which there is overlap between their approaches, and that instead the primary difference between them should be understood in terms of Childs's refusal to eradicate the hermeneutical significance of the boundary between the canonical text and the theological traditions that both shaped it and, subsequently, stemmed from it. In my view, both scholars have the potential to contribute to a reframing of the nature of tradition as it is normally conceived within the context of traditio-historical modes of biblical criticism. Additionally, there are elements within the work of both Sommer and Childs that suggest the value of continuing to reflect upon how philosophical and theological discourse concerning the nature of tradition might illuminate critical reconstructions of ancient traditions that are understood to stand behind the biblical text.

## *A Theological Account of Tradition for OT Interpretation*

### *A Philosophical Perspective on the Nature of Tradition(s)*

Alasdair MacIntyre's thought provides an initial orientation to the nature of traditions that seeks to do justice to the phenomena of both coherence and conflict.<sup>81</sup> In *After Virtue* (1984), he defines a living tradition as "...a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition," thus recognizing the inevitability of conflict in dynamic, living traditions.<sup>82</sup> In his subsequent *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988) MacIntyre expands upon the nature of conflict within and between traditions of rationality, explaining:

A tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain kinds of fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted.<sup>83</sup>

Although his two major works cited above provide what is arguably the most comprehensive and developed account of MacIntyre's thought, an earlier, seminal essay provides additional insight into the way that he understands the role and function of conflict among traditions of rationality. In an essay entitled "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," first published in 1977, MacIntyre argues that "what constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible of rival interpretations."<sup>84</sup> The major source of this conflict is defined by MacIntyre as an *epistemological crisis*, that is, "the existence of alternative and rival schemata which yield mutually incompatible accounts of what is going on..."<sup>85</sup> In other words, a crisis

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<sup>81</sup> Both Richard Briggs (*Virtuous Reader*) and Stephen Fowl ("Effective History") have recently appropriated MacIntyre's thought within the context of theological hermeneutics, yet with different emphases than are pursued here. Whereas their engagement has focused primarily upon MacIntyre's moral philosophy itself, my application of his thought in the present context is primarily oriented toward its epistemological contribution.

<sup>82</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222. See also Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 219.

<sup>83</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 12.

<sup>84</sup> MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 62.

<sup>85</sup> MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 55.

consists in the revelation and/or recognition of different interpretive possibilities than what has previously been regarded as normative in one's epistemological paradigm, and this takes place both at the level of the individual worldview and within large-scale traditions of rationality.

MacIntyre stresses that, far from being accidental, avoidable or even lamentable moments of disruption, epistemological crises are in fact inevitable, and have the potential to contribute positively to the coherence and vitality of traditions. The development of a tradition, what MacIntyre calls "epistemological progress," necessarily involves "the construction and reconstruction of more adequate narratives and forms of narrative."<sup>86</sup> In the case of internal conflict (i.e. *within* a given tradition), "epistemological crises are occasions for such reconstruction."<sup>87</sup> When it comes to external conflict (i.e. *between* rival traditions), crises offer key points at which the relative coherence of each paradigm may be apprehended.<sup>88</sup>

It may initially seem that MacIntyre's account provides an element of support or justification for the ways in which the concept of tradition operates within modern OT criticism. He not only emphasizes the presence and inevitability of conflict within and amongst traditions, but also claims that such conflicts are precisely what *constitute* a tradition. Surely, this account is precisely what is reflected in many reconstructions offered by biblical scholars, wherein the biblical text displays evidence of tension and conflict within and between various groups in ancient Israel and the theological traditions that they advocate/espouse. However, a closer look at MacIntyre's epistemological account of the nature of tradition reveals key differences that have the potential to re-orient the dominant modes of historical reconstruction operative within the field of OT/HB studies.

First, MacIntyre's treatment offers a nuanced account of the ways in which smaller sub-traditions may be understood as "internal, interpretive debates" that

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<sup>86</sup> MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 58.

<sup>87</sup> MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 58.

<sup>88</sup> For more on MacIntyre's epistemological account of traditions in theological perspective, see Murphy et al, eds., *Virtues and Practices*, as well as Trenery, *MacIntyre, Lindbeck, and Tradition*, 1-60. Cf. Westphal, *Whose Community?*



develop within the context of “large-scale traditions.”<sup>89</sup> Within the field of biblical scholarship, this concept is not dissimilar from the notion of streams of tradition (*theologische Strömungen*), as developed especially within the work of O. H. Steck.<sup>90</sup> Yet, whereas approaches such as those of Sharp and Sommer can sometimes emphasize the diversity of, and conflict between, sub-traditions or streams of tradition at the expense of a construal of their relationship within the context of a large-scale tradition, MacIntyre offers a more nuanced theoretical model. Commenting upon the way in which disagreement among sub-traditions constitute the nature of a large-scale tradition, he explains that such internal debates have the potential to “destroy what had been the basis of common fundamental agreement,” leading to either rivalry and factionalism (so, external rivalry between sub-traditions) or a lapse into incoherence and the consequent demise of the tradition itself.<sup>91</sup> What this suggests is that at some point, an identification of diverse traditions (or streams of tradition) that fails to articulate any “common fundamental agreement” constitutive of their participation within a large-scale tradition will lapse into incoherence at the level of the large-scale tradition.

While it is possible (perhaps even probable) that many biblical critics operate with a latent assumption that such a broad-scale agreement was operative within the religion of ancient Israel and/or may be observed within the canonical Old Testament, it remains the case that many discussions of biblical traditions fail to explicitly relate particular expressions of tradition, as well as the apparent tensions and conflicts between them, to the hermeneutical significance of their canonical context, or to the concept of a large-scale theological tradition in Israel that operated with some measure of coherence and continuity despite its long history of development and its many diverse expressions. My point is not that such elements of continuity and coherence ought simply to replace or overwhelm legitimate evidence of diversity and tension within or behind biblical texts, but rather that the hermeneutical relationship between

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<sup>89</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice*, 12.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Steck, “Theological Streams.”

<sup>91</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice*, 12.

continuity and diversity might be taken more seriously than it sometimes is in redaction-critical and traditio-historical study.<sup>92</sup>

Second, for all of his emphasis upon the dynamics of tension and conflict within traditions, MacIntyre is by no means interested in diversity or plurality for its own sake; rather, he argues that the conflict that constitutes a tradition has both a narrative trajectory and a teleological orientation within the context of a particular community. Recent biblical scholarship has frequently been content to identify and emphasize the elements of plurality and diversity that stand behind the biblical text – both in terms of the history of ancient Israelite religion and the compositional history of particular texts – in a way that contrasts with older forms of biblical theology, which were oriented more towards the identification of unity, continuity and coherence within the biblical narrative and its theological expressions.<sup>93</sup> What MacIntyre offers, in my view, is a model for conceiving of the nature of tradition that refuses to sacrifice *either* the inevitability of diversity and tension *or* the hermeneutical significance of coherence and continuity within traditions of rationality.

In the previous chapter, I sought to demonstrate that a number of specific theological traditions, or perhaps streams of tradition, that are frequently thought to underlie or stand behind Jeremiah's temple sermon in one way or another, have been reconstructed in ways that are both exegetically questionable and hermeneutically unpersuasive, due to a lack of sufficient attention to the ways in which they participate in large-scale traditions and relate to one another in those contexts. In the light of MacIntyre's more robust account of the nature of tradition, I suggest in addition that when an interest in diversity or multivocality is allowed to overwhelm the dynamics of continuity, reconstructions of ancient theological traditions can appear as implausibly flattened and monolithic perspectives that are simply at odds with each other, rather than closely related sub-traditions which constitute an ongoing argument precisely about the nature of a large-scale tradition in which both participate. For example, if

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<sup>92</sup> To some extent, the hermeneutical paradigms evaluated in chapter two (the inviolability hypothesis and the redactional construal of the conditional dynamic) serve as case studies illustrating this point.

<sup>93</sup> So, famously, the quest for the center (*Mitte*) of OT Theology that is now frequently disparaged as misguided. For discussion, see Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, 111-116.

both of Sharp's hypothetical groups of tradents were not primarily construed according to socio-political motivations, but also understood as representative of streams within a large-scale tradition that affirmed a concept of prophetic speech involving a meaningful relationship between divine and human freedom and agency, then the apparent evidence supporting her reconstruction would be called into question.

*Theological Perspectives on the Nature of Tradition(s)*

If a philosophical account of the nature of tradition is potentially illuminating for theologically-oriented biblical criticism, it is reasonable to expect that a robust theological account will be that much more so. As Sommer himself notes, there are voices within the Christian tradition, both Protestant and Catholic, that have articulated an approach to the relationship between scripture and tradition in a way analogous to the one he develops within the context of Jewish thought. For example, David Brown begins his study entitled *Tradition & Imagination* this way:

My aim is to show that tradition, so far from being something secondary or reactionary, is the motor that sustains revelation both within Scripture and beyond. Indeed, so much is this so that Christians must disabuse themselves of the habit of contrasting biblical revelation and later tradition, and instead see the hand of God in a continuing process that encompasses both.<sup>94</sup>

Not unlike Sommer's resistance to the "stenographic" model, Brown wants to move past what he calls a "'deposit' view of revelation" that he believes has dominated that history of Christianity. According to Brown,

Instead, we may view God as constantly interacting with his people throughout history, and in a way which takes their humanity and their conditionedness with maximum seriousness. While within Christianity the primary focus of reflection on that interaction must remain the Bible, it would be on my view a huge mistake to assume that any interaction thereafter is mediated through an unchanging text. Rather, the text becomes part of a living tradition that is constantly subject to change, and that includes change in the perceived content of the biblical narratives: new insights are generated as different social conditions open up new possibilities and perspectives.<sup>95</sup>

Like Sommer, Brown situates the nature of scripture within the context of his understanding of tradition and seeks a dialogical interaction not only between

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<sup>94</sup> Brown, *Tradition & Imagination*, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Brown, *Tradition & Imagination*, 107-108.

scripture and tradition but also between past and present in terms of meaning. He regards revelation as not only a descriptive category that may be applied to the fixed canonical text of scripture, but as a phenomenon that is operative within the composition history of the text, as well as a “process that continues well beyond the closure of the canon.”<sup>96</sup> As a result, he believes that one’s understanding of scripture will influence doctrine, but also that one’s understanding of doctrine will influence one’s understanding of scripture – “This might seem to generate a circular argument, and in one sense it does, but it does not follow from this that it is viciously circular, and to my mind it is more a matter of mutual reinforcement and enrichment.”<sup>97</sup>

The influential Roman Catholic theologian Yves M.-J. Congar likewise argues that the theological tradition of the church must be understood as living and dynamic, “not simply a repetition of the old,” but “repeated...deployed to reply to new problems.”<sup>98</sup> He speaks of a tension between “two equally vital aspects: one of development and one of conservation,” suggesting that the theological tradition of the church has an irreducible element of diachronic continuity even as it takes progressively new forms in new context and situations.<sup>99</sup> His account of the nature of tradition is not unlike MacIntyre’s:

For tradition to exist – tradition understood as the environment in which we receive the Christian faith and are formed by it – it must be borne by those who, having received it, live by it and pass it on to others, so that they may live by it in their turn. Tradition, like education, is a *living communication whose content is inseparable from the act by which one living person hands it on to another*. A written text, on the other hand, exists in its own right.<sup>100</sup>

For Congar, within the context of this holistic concept of tradition, it remains important to make a distinction between written and unwritten tradition.<sup>101</sup> He offers an account whereby tradition may be understood in its most basic sense as the transmission of the whole of Christianity, including scripture, doctrine, liturgy, etc. but also in a “stricter” sense, as a source of knowledge that is somehow distinct and independent from

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<sup>96</sup> Brown, *Tradition & Imagination*, 108.

<sup>97</sup> Brown, *Tradition & Imagination*, 108. On the potentially illuminating role of doctrine in critical biblical interpretation see the compelling recent study by Gary Anderson, *Christian Doctrine*.

<sup>98</sup> Congar, *Meaning*, 116-117.

<sup>99</sup> Congar, *Meaning*, 117.

<sup>100</sup> Congar, *Meaning*, 24 (my emphasis).

<sup>101</sup> See Congar, *Meaning*, 13-15.

scripture.<sup>102</sup> Anticipating much of what has been expressed in more recent discussions of tradition history and inner-biblical exegesis, Congar explains, “The inspired text of the Old Testament was already a reflection of the faith and meditation of the Jewish communities: our Pentateuch, in particular, seems like the final presentation of traditions gathered in such communities – for that matter, the text itself is the result of tradition.”<sup>103</sup> He further suggests that this dynamic “points to the priority of unwritten transmission over the written, and even to a certain dependence of the written text on oral transmission.”<sup>104</sup>

Although Brown and Congar echo Sommer in their commitment to understanding scripture within the context of and in relation to tradition, and while each also demonstrates an awareness that the development of tradition is at work in the processes that generated the biblical text no less than in the post-canonical processes of reception and interpretation, both remain committed to a distinction between canonical scripture and the Church’s tradition. Thus, they seem to illustrate the possibility of understanding a capacity for development to be inherent to the nature of tradition and yet still maintain a sense of meaningful boundaries between scripture and tradition in contrast to Sommer’s construal of ongoing conversation or debate.

Congar’s account of the nature of tradition is articulated most fully in his two-volume *Tradition and Traditions*, but also in the slimmer *The Meaning of Tradition*.<sup>105</sup> Congar understands tradition as a flexible and multivalent concept, capable of

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<sup>102</sup> See Congar, *Meaning*, 15-33 and 33-46, respectively.

<sup>103</sup> Congar, *Meaning*, 16-17. He goes on to explain that “The same is true, in part, of the texts of the New Testament...” (17).

<sup>104</sup> Congar, *Meaning*, 17. Another one of the key points Congar makes in this context is that the church could not simply wait until the delimitation of canon was all sorted out – as he puts it, “she had to live,” and she existed as the church based on tradition even before the scriptures were written and canonized. Therefore, “She was the Church from the time of the apostles and not the product of their writings,” and thus, “Tradition, as understood in this paragraph, is the communication of the entire heritage of the apostles, effected in a different way from that of their writings” (22).

<sup>105</sup> *La Tradition et Les Traditions* was published initially in French as two separate volumes (*Essai Historique*, 1960; *Essai Théologique*, 1963), and then combined in an English translation (*Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay*) in 1966; *The Meaning of Tradition* was originally published in French in 1964, and serves as a useful, concise guide to many of the issues worked out more fully in *La Tradition et Les Traditions*. See also the insightful discussion of Congar’s account of tradition in Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 223-241.

denoting the material content of scripture itself as well as the deposit or rule of faith, the process of handing down the content of that tradition (i.e. transmission), and the interpretative tradition within which the development of doctrine takes place.

Indeed, if 'tradition' is taken in its basic, strict sense, signifying transmission, or delivery, it includes the *whole* communication, excluding nothing. If, then, we consider the *content* of what is offered, tradition comprises equally the holy Scriptures and, besides these, not only doctrines but things: the sacraments, ecclesiastical institutions, the powers of the ministry, customs and liturgical rites – in fact, all the Christian realities themselves.<sup>106</sup>

His account of the nature of tradition involves not only the duality of the *traditio/traditum* dynamic that has featured in discussions of tradition history and inner-biblical interpretation, but also a robust and explicitly theological element. Congar links the nature of tradition directly to pneumatology and ecclesiology, understanding the Holy Spirit as the “transcendent subject” of tradition and the Christian Church as the “visible and historical subject.”<sup>107</sup> The relationship between the subject(s) of tradition, its content, and the process of transmission is interpreted within the context of the economy of salvation, initiated by the Father’s gift of the Son and, subsequently, the Spirit.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Sandra Schneiders proposes a tripartite account of the nature of tradition that includes not only the process, or *mode*, of transmission and the material *content* being transmitted, but also what she calls “the foundational gift.”<sup>109</sup> She explains, “Tradition is the Spirit of Jesus, that is, his active presence embodied in the Church.”<sup>110</sup>

The addition of this pneumatological dynamic in understanding the nature of tradition from a theological perspective provides an important link between the *traditio* and the *traditum*, and also offers a means by which to express the potential compatibility between accounts that focus on redaction and compositional development and those that focus on the subject matter of the final, or canonical form.

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<sup>106</sup> Congar, *Meaning*, 13. See further the discussion on 15-46, 128-129, and note the similarity between the distinction between *traditum* (the material content) and *traditio* (the process of transmission) as discussed in Knight, *Rediscovering*, and then taken up and adapted in Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 6ff.

<sup>107</sup> Congar, *Meaning*, 51-81.

<sup>108</sup> Congar, *Meaning*, 10.

<sup>109</sup> Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 71-81.

<sup>110</sup> Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 73.

Numerous theologians have proposed that, in the light of the discoveries of modern biblical criticism, the doctrine of inspiration can and should be expanded to cover the entire process of transmission in the sense of compositional development that led to the phenomenon of the canon of Christian scripture.<sup>111</sup> However, this does not necessarily imply a relativization of the significance of canon, since one may differentiate between the process of transmission that led to canon and the process of transmission that interprets those scriptures.<sup>112</sup> In other words, it is possible to affirm much of what Sommer argues, in terms of conceiving of scripture as a component of tradition and relating the process of its composition to that of its reception and interpretation, while still retaining a meaningful and hermeneutically significant distinction between scripture and tradition. From a Christian perspective, tradition may be understood as fluid and dynamic, involving both pre-canonical and post-canonical phenomena, constituting not merely preservation of static content but also constructive development.<sup>113</sup> Yet, such dynamism may be affirmed without denying a meaningful boundary between the pre-canonical origins, development of, and interactions between theological traditions and the canonical form that functions authoritatively within subsequent tradition. Although the nature of tradition both behind and in front of the text may be expected to feature elements of tension, conflict, and development, there remains room for a robust theological account of continuity and coherence within the tradition, linked to the Spirit's role in preservation and ensuring fidelity to tradition in the midst of complexity and diversity.

Hypotheses concerning apparent tensions or conflict between Jeremiah's perspective and the putative appeal of the popular doctrine of Zion's inviolability among his audience and opponents, or else between tradents convinced of inevitable doom and later redactors who wished to emphasize the possibility of repentance, are not necessarily implausible. However, given that the perspectives they seek to reconstruct may be understood to participate within a broader theological tradition

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<sup>111</sup> See esp. Chapman, "Reclaiming Inspiration," and Webster *Holy Scripture*, 26-30. Webster proposes an "extension" of the doctrine of sanctification to cover processes such as redaction, development, canonization, and later interpretation, so that inspiration is understood as a "sub-set" of sanctification (38-39). Cf. D'Costa, "Revelation, Scripture and Tradition," 338.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Chapman "Canon Debate."

<sup>113</sup> See Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 266ff.

that cannot be exhausted by analysis of its component parts or the relationship between them, it becomes important to consider whether apparent conflicts between traditions might alternatively be construed as efforts to maintain fidelity to the broader tradition.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, because any interpreter's critical reconstructions of an ancient tradition behind the text will be dependent upon a particular epistemological framework and set of plausibility structures, the contingency of such construals ought to be acknowledged and taken seriously.

Having suggested various problems with influential hermeneutical frameworks such as the more radical accounts of the inviolability doctrine as a putative conviction of an absolute guarantee of divine protection, and the supposed opposition between redactional factions emphasizing conditional and unconditional judgment, respectively, the present chapter has been concerned to set the stage for proposing an alternative construal of Jeremiah's temple sermon. My own reading of the two accounts of Jeremiah's temple sermon will adopt the presupposition that these texts may be understood to reflect and wrestle with theological realities such as the possibility of continued divine presence in the context of covenantal failure, and the relationship between divine and human freedom and agency in the context of prophetic speech and revelation. Such construals are compatible with the recognition of elements of diversity and tension in the biblical text and in its likely compositional history; yet I will maintain that the subject matter of Jeremiah's temple sermon is not reducible to a reconstructed conflict between opposing traditions, but may instead be understood as a crucial feature within the development of the large-scale Jeremianic tradition itself.

## ***Conclusion***

MacIntyre begins *After Virtue* with a memorable vignette, imagining a situation in which the theoretical context within which the natural sciences had previously

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<sup>114</sup> Of course, this does not mean there will not be tension or conflict, or perhaps even streams of tradition that are understood as having been mistaken or deficient in their fidelity; it does mean that such matters are best understood within the framework of a tradition that has some measure of continuity and coherence, since the component parts participate in the canonical witness to Israel's faith and the broader traditions for which the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament functions as scripture.



operated and derived meaning has been destroyed, and a subsequent attempt to retrieve or recover the scientific discipline are left with the fragmentary remains of knowledge, theories and instruments without the broader epistemological framework to provide coherence to the pursuit. He suggests that although they might retain some remnants from the previous paradigm, and may even revive some of the classical terminology, those involved in trying to practice natural science within the post-catastrophic era would struggle to make sense of their actions and would ultimately fail to realize that the pursuit they were involved in bore little resemblance to the actual discipline of natural science from a bygone era. MacIntyre sums up the situation: "For everything that they do and say conforms to certain canons of consistency and coherence and those contexts which would be needed to make sense of what they are doing have been lost, perhaps irretrievably."<sup>115</sup>

Whereas MacIntyre employs this hypothetical scenario in order to illustrate his analysis of moral philosophy in the wake of the dominance of the modern epistemological paradigm in Western culture, I suggest that it might also be illuminating for contemporary attempts to recover, develop, and practice a form of biblical criticism with an explicit theological orientation. In a way that is not dissimilar to MacIntyre's constructive account of the nature of traditions of rationality, their development, and their interaction with one another, in order to give an account of how constructive moral discourse might operate with an awareness of its tradition-dependent character, I have argued that allowing particular traditions of theological discourse to shape and inform the critical interpretation of the Old Testament provides a meaningful context within which the insights and observations gleaned from modern critical methods may yet contribute to a richly theological understanding of scripture.<sup>116</sup> Although the pursuits of redaction-criticism and traditio-historical research have contributed much that is of value to the collective understanding of the compositional development of biblical literature, the diversity of theological traditions

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<sup>115</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1-2.

<sup>116</sup> I do not mean to suggest that the historical-critical paradigm itself does not or cannot provide a meaningful context; however, I would suggest that when the paradigm functions primarily or exclusively as a framework for historically, philologically and scientifically oriented biblical study then its value as a context within which to interpret scripture from a theological perspective and with theological/ecclesial objectives is severely limited.

that underlie this material, and the way that these features of the canonical texts' prehistories might illuminate their meaning and significance, it remains the case that value of such contributions for the theological interpretation of scripture is limited to the extent that they remain "fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived."<sup>117</sup>

In the following chapters, my aim is to offer theologically-oriented, critical interpretations of Jer. 7: 1–15 and 26: 1–24 that take seriously both the evidence of their compositional development and intratextual relationship, and their canonical form and function within the Christian tradition. Having pointed out a number of weaknesses with common hermeneutical frameworks for the interpretation of the temple sermon, I will adopt alternative paradigms that are shaped by explicitly theological accounts of divine presence, prophetic speech, and divine and human freedom. Not only is this hermeneutic shaped by my own tradition-dependent location as a Christian interpreter of the OT, but my hope is that such an approach will do justice to elements of tension and diversity that are apparent within, and perhaps also behind, the canonical text as well as the dynamics of continuity and coherence that are evident within the texts themselves and the traditions within which they are understood as scripture.

There are a number of ways in which one might pursue the task of demonstrating the value of an explicitly theological hermeneutic for critical biblical interpretation. For example, advocates of theological interpretation of scripture have done so profitably by recovering hermeneutical and exegetical insights from the Patristic era (during which biblical interpretation and theological discourse were not conceived as separate disciplines), or bringing the theological vision of particular, influential voices from the tradition into conversation with contemporary biblical scholarship. Within the context of Jeremiah studies, a recent example of the former is Joshua Moon's reappropriation of Augustine's reading of the new covenant motif in Jeremiah, and an illustration of the latter may be found in the final chapter of Andrew

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<sup>117</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2-3. My insinuation that the insights of critical methods might be regarded as fragmentary is by no means intended to function as a pejorative dismissal of their significance, but rather to make the point that attention to the hermeneutical framework within which these critical insights and observations function is crucial, and that where the objectives of theologically-oriented biblical interpretation are in view, anything less than a theological framework will likely prove insufficient.

G. Shead's, *A Mouth Full of Fire*, in which the author relates the motif of the word of YHWH in the book of Jeremiah to Karl Barth's doctrine of the Word of God.<sup>118</sup> Another recent study (*Reading with the Faithful*, by Seth B. Tarrer) traces Christian understandings of the nature of true and false prophecy in the book from the early church and medieval era, through the Reformation and the birth of modern biblical criticism, up to contemporary voices in OT scholarship.<sup>119</sup> While there is much that is of value in both this general approach and in these specific contributions, the present study focuses somewhat more on the potential value of engaging contemporary theological discourse in conversation with biblical criticism. This is in no way conceived as an alternative to emphases on recovery or re-appropriation from within the tradition, but rather as complementary to such approaches.

Another possible approach might be to set my critically-informed exegesis of Jeremiah's temple sermon in conversation with the specific doctrinal commitments of my own denomination or theological tradition, thereby illustrating more concretely the in-principle argument I have made for the value of acknowledging one's own tradition-dependent posture as a biblical interpreter and thus engaging the tradition as a resource rather than merely a potential liability. Again, such an approach would certainly have its merits; however, the readings of the temple sermon that I am most concerned to critique and propose an alternative to stem from assumptions that are operative within multiple contemporary theological and hermeneutical traditions. Thus, it has seemed more useful to adopt a slightly more general appeal to the significance of theological discourse as a resource for the interpretation of the temple sermon. In the following chapters, my readings of Jeremiah 7 and 26 are conducted using various critical methods, and in close dialogue with critical scholarship, and yet consistently seeking to challenge many of the methodological assumptions and exegetical conclusions that are operative within this interpretative paradigm by (re-)introducing and taking seriously particular theological categories. The conclusion to each chapter then seeks to illustrate somewhat more fully the hermeneutical

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<sup>118</sup> See Moon, *Jeremiah's New Covenant*, and Shead, *Mouth Full of Fire*, 265-290.

<sup>119</sup> Tarrer, *Reading with the Faithful*.

implications of understanding the messages of these interrelated biblical texts within the context of the Christian theological tradition.

## 4. Dwelling, Place, and Presence: Jeremiah 7:1–15

In this chapter I propose a theologically-oriented reading of the initial account of Jeremiah's temple sermon in Jer. 7:1–15. This portion of the thesis has two interrelated objectives. For one thing, it constitutes a fresh interpretation of this text, with the primary goal of elucidating what I take to be the central theological concerns raised by this text.<sup>1</sup> I argue that the temple sermon communicates a message of conditional judgment, involving a promise of divine presence, a warning against deception, and a threat that evokes the prospect of divine absence, or non-presence. In addition, I seek to demonstrate that because this text exhibits a more direct and persistent concern with the subject of divine presence and absence than is frequently acknowledged, explicit engagement with theological discourse related to divine presence is not only warranted but also constitutes a valuable resource for the interpretation of the text. This chapter also functions as a case study for the hermeneutical argument set out in chapters two and three, and therefore in it I seek both to illustrate my critiques of alternative interpretative frameworks and to test my central thesis regarding the role of tradition in biblical interpretation.<sup>2</sup> In what follows I aim to show that the canonical form of Jer. 7:1–15 may be understood as a coherent whole, and that the presence of tensions and complexity, as well as possible theological diversity within its compositional history, need not preclude a robust account of its meaning within its present form and context.

### *The Structure and Scope of the Temple Sermon*

The account of the temple sermon in Jeremiah 7:1–15 may be subdivided into the following sections: following a string of introductory formulae (vv. 1–2), the message

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<sup>1</sup> This kind of exegetical approach has often been associated with Karl Barth's emphasis on what he called *die Sache*, or subject-matter, of the biblical text; more recently, Stephen Chapman has framed his own theologically-oriented interpretation as an attempt to describe what the text is *about* (see Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture*, 2ff., 28-30). See also Moberly, "Theological Approaches," 500-501.

<sup>2</sup> Having engaged representative redaction-critical and traditio-historical proposals in these previous chapters, my analysis in this context will engage more closely with the biblical text itself, keeping matters related to the formation of the text to a minimum.

of the prophet is comprised mainly of a promise (vv. 3, 5–7), a warning (vv. 4, 8–11), and a threat or oracle of judgment (vv. 12–15). Of course, delineating the structure in this way is contestable, but the justification for doing so will become clear in the exegesis that follows.<sup>3</sup>

The opening verses provide a narrative introduction, a setting, and the initial divine injunction to the prophet (vv. 1–2).<sup>4</sup> Following this, the prophet's message itself is recounted, with verses 3–4 setting out two distinct imperatives that are subsequently expanded upon in verses 5–7 and 8–11, respectively, and followed by a climactic announcement of judgment in vv. 12–15.<sup>5</sup> Verse 3 introduces a positive, implicitly conditional promise that is developed in a more explicitly conditional form (אם...ו) in vv. 5–7, with further detail added to both the protasis and the apodosis.<sup>6</sup> In parallel fashion, verse 4 introduces an initial prohibition (אלֹתֵיבַטְחוּ לָכֶם אֱלֹדִיבְרֵי הַשָּׁקֶר) that is developed further in the reiterative indictment, אַתֶּם בַּטְחִים לָכֶם עַל־דִּבְרֵי הַשָּׁקֶר, along with a series of rhetorical questions in vv. 8–11, together explicating what this kind of trusting in deceptive words amounts to. Yet even as vv. 5–7 and vv. 8–11 may be understood as

<sup>3</sup> Moberly offers a similar account of the structure of the passage in *Prophecy and Discernment*, 57 (cf. Overholt, *Threat of Falsehood*, 2, 11). For alternative accounts of the structure, see, e.g. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 453–459, and Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 1:238–239.

<sup>4</sup> Holladay (*Jeremiah* 1: 235) follows Janzen (*Studies*, 36–37) in “rejecting” the more extensive introduction of vv. 1–2 MT in view of the likelihood that this represents an expansion of the briefer textual form represented by LXX. Lundbom, on the other hand, follows Tov (1997:154) in citing the evidence of 4QJer<sup>a</sup> in favor of the MT reading (See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 460). Aside from the question of the relative antiquity of the textual traditions that each of the extant versions bears witness to, it remains the case that in the present form of the passage in MT these verses introduce the scene, provide a setting, and contribute to the book's broader portrayal of the relationship between the divine exhortation to the prophet and Jeremiah's own message to the people. In addition, the material in 7:2b is envisioned as the first part of the actual oracle the prophet is instructed to deliver. Thus, in MT, both the narrative setting and the opening address together suggest the temple as the locale envisioned by ‘this place’ in v. 3.

<sup>5</sup> My interpretation of the text is based on the canonical form (MT), and thus here I simply differentiate between the narrative introduction comprised of oracular formulae (vv. 1–2) and the sermon “proper” as it is presented in the text (vv. 3–15). Cf. Holladay for a historical emphasis. An alternative construal of the component parts of the text, based on a reconstruction of its compositional history, is offered by Thiel, *Redaktion 1–25*, 105–119. Cf. Nicholson, *Preaching*, 69.

<sup>6</sup> The implicit condition of the promise in v. 3 (הִיטִיבוּ דַרְכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם) is extended in the protasis of vv. 5b–6, detailing the acts of justice and proper forms of worship that would constitute such amendment. Likewise, the cohortative clause of v. 3 (וְאַשְׁכְּנָה אִתְּכֶם בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה) is extended by the appositional phrase of v. 7b that equates the potentially ambiguous מָקוֹם with the land given to the ancestors of the people of Judah.

extensions of vv. 3 and 4 respectively, the relationship between the promise and the prohibition in vv. 3–11 as a whole should not be overlooked.<sup>7</sup> That is, refraining from trusting in deception (vv. 4, 8–11) is part of what it is envisaged by the amending of the peoples' ways and actions (vv. 3, 5–7) that is called for; or, to put it negatively, disregarding the prohibition and trusting in deceptive words functions to prevent the repentance that is envisioned by the imperatives to amend.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the climax of the passage (vv. 12–15) announces the imminence of divine judgment as a result of the actions of the people, and because of their consistent failure to hear (שמע) or to answer (ענה) YHWH, despite his repeated attempts to communicate.<sup>9</sup> The force of this declaration is enhanced by citing the ancient sanctuary of Shiloh as a precedent for the judgment that is now pronounced upon Judah and the Jerusalem sanctuary.

Despite the well-defined structure that may be discerned within this text, a number of elements of ambiguity related to key terms and concepts in the temple sermon complicate its interpretation. Specifically, the ambiguity of the consonantal text in vv. 3 and 7 allows for two distinct, legitimate vocalizations for the key verbal action of dwelling in the divine promise that is central to the message of the sermon as a whole. This ambiguity is further amplified by the inherent polyvalence of the term מקום and a level of uncertainty regarding the antecedent of the demonstrative construction “*this place*” in each context it is used. Finally, the way in which Shiloh is meant to function as a precedent for the announcement of divine judgment in vv. 12–15 is rendered obscure both by the way it relates to the “dwelling” and “place” terminology in the rest of the passage and by the ambiguous dual reference to what YHWH “did” (עשה) to that ancient cultic site. The purpose of the present chapter is to highlight and

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<sup>7</sup> The negative commands about avoiding idolatry and injustice (e.g. oppression, bloodshed, following other gods) in vv. 5–6 are closely related to the rhetorical questions of vv. 9–11, which strongly implies that such forms of idolatry and injustice preclude the kind of security and safety that is sought by the people and proclaimed by the words of deception.

<sup>8</sup> Thus, there is a sense in which the dual imperatives of vv. 3–4 (and their subsequent expansions) constitute parallel commands, and yet there is simultaneously a sense in which the imperative clause of v. 3 (היטיבו דרכיכם ומעליכם), represents the controlling message of the sermon, with the prohibition against trusting in deceptive words constituting one among various elements that are related to it.

<sup>9</sup> In this context, it is reasonable to understand the actions envisioned by these verbs as functionally equivalent to the acts of “amending” or “repentance,” since they have to do with hearing and responding to God’s persistent speaking through his servants the prophets.

explore these elements of textual and semantic ambiguity with a view to arguing that Jeremiah's temple sermon exhibits a greater concern over the dynamics of divine presence and absence than is often recognized.

Therefore, in what follows I argue that the central promise, warning, and threat of the temple sermon focus on the issue of whether or not YHWH will continue to dwell with his people, and that this dwelling is envisioned in a way that holds in tension the motifs of God's dwelling place being the temple itself and of the continued dwelling of the people in the land as a whole. Rather than taking the elements of tension and ambiguity primarily as indicative of the process of compositional development, I explore the possibility that they may be understood as theologically meaningful in the context of the canonical form of the text. I will first argue for a reading of the conditional promise in vv. 3 and 5–7 that retains the ambiguity of "dwelling" and "place" terminology within the consonantal text, and thereby resists the impulse to decide between the theological motifs of divine presence and possession of the land. In the subsequent section I will maintain that the warning against trusting in deceptive words in vv. 4 and 8–11 may likewise be understood in connection with the dynamics of divine presence and absence (as opposed to revealing an implicit critique of a putative doctrine of Zion's inviolability). Finally, I will suggest that the references to the sanctuary at Shiloh in vv. 12–15 may be understood to complement the motif of divine presence that has been established in the text, since the reference to what YHWH "did" to Shiloh (v. 12) may plausibly be understood as the departure of the divine presence (כבוד) from the midst of the people of Israel, as depicted within the context of the Ark Narrative of 1 Sam. 4–6.

### *Section 1: The Promise of the Temple Sermon (vv. 3, 5–7)*

#### *What is the Promise?*

Among the key questions in any critical discussion of Jeremiah's temple sermon is the vocalization of the verbal forms of the root שכן in verses 3 and 7, in connection with the imprecise spatial referent envisaged by the prepositional phrase במקום הזה. In the Masoretic Text (MT), the verb in verse 3 is pointed as a *piel* imperfect 1CS, cohortative,



and in v. 7 it is pointed as a *piel*, converted perfect 1CS. In both cases, however, the consonantal text may alternatively be pointed as *qal* forms, and in both cases the alternative vocalization results in a legitimate grammatical and syntactical relationship in which the subsequent אַתְּכֶם would be pointed to read “with you” (אַתְּכֶם) rather than as an accusative particle + 2MP pronominal suffix as the direct object (אֶתְּכֶם). The conditional promise articulated in these verses is either that YHWH will allow, or cause, the people of Judah to dwell in a particular place or else that he will dwell with them there. Moreover, the way in which this verbal action of dwelling is understood will then influence decisively whether the ambiguous ‘this place’ is understood to refer to the temple, to the land, or perhaps to both. Thus, the motifs of dwelling, place, and possibly also divine presence are interrelated in this initial section of the passage.

According to the reading of MT, verses 3 and 7 each feature a *piel* form of the verb שָׁכַן in the first person with YHWH as the subject, followed by the accusative particle with a 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural suffix functioning as the direct object of the verb.<sup>10</sup> Thus the conditional promise may be understood as YHWH’s causing or allowing another agent, the collective people of Judah, to dwell or to remain somewhere. In both verses, this reading effectively determines the interpretation one will give to the otherwise ambiguous בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה; that is, if the subject matter is God’s promise to cause his people to dwell in a particular place, then it is reasonable to infer that this locale must denote the land of Judah or the city of Jerusalem rather than the temple structure.<sup>11</sup> The alternative reading of these verses may be traced at least as far back as Aquila’s Greek translation and Jerome’s Vulgate, and is also advocated in the work of some modern scholars, including Wilhelm Rudolph, the editor of the book of Jeremiah

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<sup>10</sup> Although these two verses feature different verbal forms, they function semantically in closely parallel ways. In v. 3 the cohortative verb form initiates a dependent clause that is related to the preceding imperative by the conjunction ו, and so the two clauses function together as a conditional sentence (see Waltke and O’Connor, *Syntax*, 575); in v. 7 the converted perfect features as part of the apodosis within the explicitly conditional sentence of vv. 5–7. On the use of this form subsequent to an imperative, see Joüon-Muraoka, §119 l.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, what in verse 3 is a logical inference based on the subject and object of the verbal action is confirmed by the explicit appositional phrase in v. 7, identifying ‘this place’ as ‘the land that I gave to your fathers for all time’. Therefore, both verses 3 and 7 may be understood as articulating the same conditional promise: if the envisioned forms of amendment do take place (vv. 5–6), then YHWH will allow his people to continue to live in the land of Judah.

in BHS.<sup>12</sup> According to the alternative vocalization, verses 3 and 7 are both pointed as *qal* forms, and should therefore be understood to indicate YHWH's own promise to dwell rather than his causing another agent to do so. This reading then demands that the subsequent construction must function as a prepositional phrase ('*with*' + 2MP suffix) in the genitive position rather than as the direct object (*nota accusativi* + 2MP suffix) as it does in MT.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, this interpretation suggests that the prepositional phrase '*in this place*' may be understood in more flexible terms, as an indication of YHWH's promise to dwell with his people in the land, via the temple.

The most common form of argument in support of one or the other of these alternative vocalizations has been to appeal to a particular interpretation of the central theme of the temple sermon as a whole. To put it simply, if the passage is primarily concerned with land possession, then it is imperative to maintain the MT reading, whereas if the main theme is divine presence in the midst of the people then the vocalization ought to be emended. Thus, most scholars have made a decision that is designed to resolve the various elements of ambiguity by stressing the validity of one reading over against the other.

#### *Land Possession and the Threat of Exile*

For many scholars, it is clear that this text focuses primarily upon the alternatives of the people remaining in the land or else being cast into exile. Thomas Overholt, for instance, argues that "The general theme of this passage is the continued relationship of Yahweh to his people, with the specific focus being narrowed to the problem of their continued existence in the land."<sup>14</sup> After all, according to MT, the land is the positive

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<sup>12</sup> Among the ancient versions, Aquila and Vulgate bear witness to an interpretation that reflects the *qal* pointing of the verbal forms followed by the prepositional construction (נִשְׁכַּח), and so they understand the sense of verses 3 and 7 as a promise of YHWH dwelling with his people (although it should be noted that *a'* follows the alternative pointing in v. 3 only [καὶ σκηνώσω σὺν ὑμῖν], coinciding with LXX in v. 7; see apparatus in Zeigler's Göttingen edition, *Ieremias Septuaginta*, 183-184). McKane (*Jeremiah*, 1:160) offers a list of the modern commentators who have followed this reading (Calvin, Blayney, Ehrlich, Volz, Rudolph and Reventlow), among whom W. Rudolph is perhaps the most significant, given his role in preparing the *BHS* apparatus for the book of Jeremiah. Among more recent proponents of the alternative vocalization in English-speaking scholarship, see Bright, *Jeremiah*, 55 and Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and Temple*, 90. See also HALOT, 1499 and Jenni, *Das hebräische Pi'el*, 93.

<sup>13</sup> See Waltke and O'Connor, *Syntax*, 303.

<sup>14</sup> Overholt, *Threat of Falsehood*, 3.

focus of the conditional promise in vv. 3 and 7, whereas the temple seems to be merely a source of false assurance in divine protection.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the complacent belief of the people that the temple might guarantee their safety (e.g. v. 10: נַצִּלְנוּ “*we are safe/delivered*”), and the culminating reference to the exile of the Northern Kingdom (אֲפָרַיִם, v. 15) lend further weight to the contention that the overall concern of the temple sermon is with (1) the problem of Judah’s complacent trust in the temple and its guarantee of divine presence and protection, and (2) the announcement of exile as judgment, which will bring with it the destruction of precisely that entity which has served as a false sense of security, and loss of land/deportation.<sup>16</sup> Thus, concludes Overholt, the “main issue in the Temple Sermon is whether the people are to be allowed to remain in their land.”<sup>17</sup> For some, this line of reasoning is further bolstered by the importance of the motif of exile as retributive judgment within the dominant interpretative paradigm for the book of Jeremiah, that is, Dtr perspective that is often held to have been so influential in the composition and development of the canonical form of the book.<sup>18</sup>

According to William McKane, the phrase וְאַשְׁכְּנָה אִתְּכֶם בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה in Jer. 7:3 “*can only mean* ‘and I will make your possession of this place secure’ or ‘so that I may make your possession of this place secure’, and the reference *must be* to possession of the land (Judah) or of Jerusalem, its capital city.”<sup>19</sup> He stresses the differences between the way the terms שָׁכַן and מָקוֹם are combined in *this* context, on the one hand, and in the Deuteronomistic formula concerning “the place that YHWH your God will choose, to make his name dwell there...” (Deut. 12:11; cf. 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2; Neh. 1:9), on the other, claiming that even if one opted for the alternative pointing reflected in Aquila

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<sup>15</sup> Overholt, *Threat of Falsehood*, 3. Such false assurance may be envisioned in more general terms of religious complacency (as in Moberly’s interpretation) or, more commonly, in terms of the hypothesis of a conflict over the supposed doctrine of Zion’s inviolability (see, e.g., Baruchi-Unna, “Hezekiah’s Prayer and Jeremiah’s Polemic”).

<sup>16</sup> Overholt (*Threat of Falsehood*, 16-18) notes that the term נַצִּל is frequently associated with protection or deliverance in the context of military threat, and when joined with the language of YHWH casting out the people from his presence (וְהִשְׁלַכְתִּי אִתְּכֶם, v. 15) this is suggestive of exile. Cf. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 59-60.

<sup>17</sup> Overholt, *Threat of Falsehood*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> The view that a form of theodicy in the wake of exile is central to the Deuteronomistic perspective that has shaped the book of Jeremiah is especially prominent in Nicholson, *Preaching*, see esp. 68-69. Cf. Holt, “Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon.”

<sup>19</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:160 (my emphasis).

and the Vulgate, there would still be no justification for finding in our passage the concept of YHWH establishing his name in the temple.<sup>20</sup> McKane then construes v. 7 as “a recapitulation of the last clause of v. 3,” and rearticulates that מקום here must mean the land as a whole or the city, a contention that relies on the same arguments given for v. 3 above and is apparently confirmed by the appositional phrase about the land being given to the ancestors of Judah.<sup>21</sup>

In order to justify his argument regarding the precise meaning of v. 3, McKane claims that (1) the Deuteronom(ist)ic formula related to the dwelling of YHWH’s name is “of quite a different kind” than the usage in Jer. 7:3, and that (2) the “attempt to save a reference to the temple in v. 3 will necessitate further rescue attempts at vv. 6 and 7.”<sup>22</sup> While he acknowledges that מקום may refer to either temple or land at various points in the book of Deuteronomy, McKane expresses concern that the “quite distinct theme” of the possession of the land should not be excluded from the interpretation of the temple sermon, and his own construal seems largely motivated by this concern. He concludes:

Verse 3 makes possession of the land conditional on a way of life which accords with Yahweh’s demands, and this is a theme which is common in Deuteronomy (6.18f.; 7.12f.; 8.1; 11.8f.; 16.20; 19.8f.), where מקום is principally used of a temple or sanctuary, although it does refer to the Promised Land in a number of places (1.31; 9.7; 11.5; 26.9).<sup>23</sup>

It is difficult to see why McKane understands his argument to be so certain. He has recognized that the term מקום can be somewhat ambiguous within the book of Deuteronomy, potentially referring to the temple/sanctuary or to the land, and also that there is a common Deuteronom(ist)ic formula that associates this term with the notion of YHWH causing his name to dwell in a particular location. It is undeniable

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<sup>20</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:160. The Deuteronom(ist)ic formula to which he refers tends to feature some variation of לשכן שמו...המקום, thus combining very similar terminology related to dwelling and place to what is used in Jer. 7. In Deuteronomy, however, one tends to see a *piel* infinitive construct form of שכן combined with the term מקום in a way that clearly indicates a temple. Cf. Richter, *Deuteronomistic History*.

<sup>21</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:161.

<sup>22</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:160. McKane uses the term “Deuteronom(ist)ic” in this context, whereas in the present section I employ an admittedly cumbersome hybrid term in an effort both to do justice to his use of the terminology and to reflect the fact that this formula appears, with variations, in both the book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history.

<sup>23</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:160.

that in v. 3 we are confronted with “quite a different kind” of formula than the one he has identified in Deuteronomy, and yet it is unclear how it would follow from this distinction that the Jeremianic usage could not involve a reference to the temple. McKane offers no compelling grammatical or syntactical reason for rejecting the alternative pointing, and his stress on the importance of the “possession of the land” motif does not necessarily rule out a possible complementary emphasis on YHWH dwelling with His people in, or via, the temple. In response, therefore, one might simply agree that Jer. 7:3 features a very different construction from those examples highlighted from Deuteronomy, not least in its more direct form of speaking about YHWH’s presence in the temple, without the mediating technique of personifying his name.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in spite of the difference, and contra McKane, it remains possible that the temple sermon here expresses concern with the presence of YHWH in the temple.

As for the second aspect of McKane’s argument, it may simply be asserted that if there are good reasons for even potentially following the alternative pointing of the text, or at least retaining some of the ambiguity inherent in the consonantal form of the verbs *וַיִּשְׁכְּנֵהוּ* and *וַיִּשְׁכְּנֵהוּ* (combined with the flexible term *מִקְוֶה*) at early stages in the textual tradition, then neither the interpretation of v. 3 nor the related approach to vv. 6 and 7 need be understood as “rescue attempts” but rather may be construed as attempts to make sense of and do justice to an ambiguous construction in a passage with complex and interrelated concerns. Moreover, in my own reading below, it will become apparent that finding an emphasis on God dwelling with His people in the temple in v. 3 will not lead to an attempted harmonization with the reading of vv. 6–7, since in these latter verses there are good reasons for understanding *מִקְוֶה* as a reference to the land as a whole. It is precisely because the text doesn’t make things entirely clear, but rather seems in certain places to be quite probably referencing temple and in others to be quite probably referencing land, that I think highlighting the ambiguity

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<sup>24</sup> Of course, a version of the Deuteronomistic motif of YHWH’s name dwelling in the temple is by no means absent from the temple sermon (see vv. 10–11, 14); however, in verses 3 and 7 there remains the possibility that a more direct portrayal of YHWH’s dwelling with His people might be envisaged. If the legitimacy of the alternative vocalizations is granted, then there arises the interpretative issue of working out how these portrayals might relate to each other. The potential value of such a task should not be undercut by assuming that the text cannot mean ‘X’ simply because ‘X’ is not a properly Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic construction.

and polyvalence of the key terms in this particular case is a more helpful reading strategy than arguments about definite meaning.<sup>25</sup>

In his discussion of vv. 8–15 McKane notes that the theme of possession of the land disappears and the theme of the inviolability of the Jerusalem temple takes its place.<sup>26</sup> Then, commenting on the conclusion of the sermon, he explains:

The speech concludes with a threat which culminates in v. 14 (the Jerusalem temple will be destroyed as the temple at Shiloh was), but the other theme of ‘possession of the land’ intrudes in this verse, for it is evident that מקום in conjunction with אשר נתתי לכם ולאבותיכם must mean ‘land’ or ‘city’ and not ‘temple’. Further, it is this intrusive element in v. 14 which is developed in v. 15 and Rudolph is probably correct in his assumption that v. 15 is secondary. It deals with loss of the land: Judah will go into exile just as the northern kingdom was banished to Assyria. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the train of thought which is set in motion by v. 8 (or, perhaps v. 4...) has reached its proper conclusion with the threat that the Jerusalem temple will suffer the same fate as the sanctuary at Shiloh and that v. 15 is something of an afterthought.<sup>27</sup>

While he resists efforts to isolate the putative *ipsissima verba* of the prophet, McKane is content to accept E.W. Nicholson’s judgment that there is a “core” within vv. 1–15 (i.e. verses 4, 9–12 and 14) which focuses on the temple, and that this has been “expanded and elaborated by the application of a different theme (possession/loss of the land).”<sup>28</sup> Although McKane recognizes the presence of both themes of temple and land within this redaction-critical hypothesis, the emphasis with respect to the temple is primarily upon its destruction rather than divine presence.

William Holladay also highlights the fact that each reading of vv. 3 and 7 has its proponents among the major commentators, claiming that “Both readings have

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<sup>25</sup> Thus, in resisting McKane’s argument, my intention is not simply to insist on the theme of divine presence in the temple over against his own emphasis, thus realizing his concern that the theme of possession of the land would be ignored; rather, I am calling into question the importance, if not the possibility, of establishing with certainty one reading of ואשכנה אתכם במקום הזה over another, and arguing that the apparent presence and interrelationship of a concern with both the temple and the land within the passage as a whole should be further cause for retaining a sense of ambiguity or polyvalence in the consonantal text rather than assigning an exclusive and determinative meaning to the construction.

<sup>26</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:161. cf. Overholt, *Threat of Falsehood*, 1-23.

<sup>27</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:164.

<sup>28</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:164-165, citing Nicholson, *Preaching*, 69. His caution against reconstructing a putative ‘original text’ is set in the context of a discussion of the work of Skinner, followed to some extent by Thiel.

cogency and each can be argued from context.”<sup>29</sup> His own contention is that there is a logical development over the course of the passage which may be discerned if the vocalization is changed toward Vulgate in v. 3 but retained with MT in v. 7. According to Holladay, the phrase במקום הזה in vv. 3–4 clearly refers to the temple and so the issue must be that of YHWH’s dwelling in the temple: “The passage cannot mean that Yahweh lets Judah dwell there.”<sup>30</sup> However, the repetition of the demonstrative construction במקום הזה in v. 7 is qualified by the phrase אשר נתתי לאבותיכם, suggesting that the place in view is the land as a whole rather than the temple. In this latter context, it is appropriate that the issue would be that of YHWH’s allowing the people of Israel to dwell rather than his own presence.<sup>31</sup> According to Holladay, the consistent vocalization in MT might be explained as a result not only of the attraction of v. 3 to the expression in v. 7 (i.e. a text-critical rationale) but also “because of a theological aversion to making Yahweh’s action dependent on the action of the people.”<sup>32</sup>

In Holladay’s reading then, one may observe,

a deliberate shift from v 3 to v 7, not only in the meaning of ‘in this place’ but in the stem of ‘dwell’ and in the two second plural expressions ‘with you’ (אַתֶּם) and ‘you,’ direct object (אֶתְכֶם). Verses 5–7 are not then an expansion of vv 3–4 at all but a second sort of statement.<sup>33</sup>

In the first part of the passage, the amending of ways will lead to YHWH’s presence being maintained in the temple, but in vv. 5–7 the focus shifts and the same sort of positive behavior is envisioned as allowing for the continued presence of the people in

<sup>29</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 1:237. In addition to those cited above, Holladay notes that there are 9 Hebrew mss. that follow the Vulgate in their interpretation of v. 7 (Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 1:236). Cf. Fohrer, “Jeremias Tempelwort.”

<sup>30</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 1:237 (noteworthy is the corresponding certainty with which Holladay and McKane make their contradictory arguments). Holladay notes that the term מקום refers to a cultic site also in v. 12, and that the notion of the temple as the place associated with the dwelling of YHWH’s name is found also in Deut. 12:11; 14:23 and 1 Kgs. 8:29–30, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Here, Holladay cites Jer. 25:5–7 as evidence of a parallel passage which involves much of the same terminology as 7:5–7, but featuring the root ישב in connection with the land.

<sup>32</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 1:237. He suggests, “The syntax of course suggests that Yahweh’s sovereignty is in this instance dependent on the conduct of the people, and this perception of a dangerous limitation on his independence must have stimulated the vocalization of *M*” (241). However, it is not at all clear that the Jeremiah tradition is opposed to presenting the relationship between the freedom of YHWH and the choices of human beings as interrelated in dynamic and contingent ways. For more nuanced discussions of this dynamic see Moberly’s discussions of Jer. 18:1–12 in *Old Testament Theology*, 116–127 and *Prophecy and Discernment*, 48–55.

<sup>33</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 1:237.

the land. Holladay further explains, “In both actions Yahweh is sovereign, but both actions are to some degree contingent on the adherence of the people to his covenant. If they are faithful, then he will dwell with them in the temple area, indeed he will dwell with them in the whole land.”<sup>34</sup>

The interpretations sketched above offer the perceived advantage of resolving both the ambiguity of the consonantal text and the semantic ambiguity of the demonstrative construction of both verses in a mutually reinforcing way.<sup>35</sup> However, a number of factors suggest that these elements of ambiguity need not be resolved so swiftly or decisively. For one thing, it was noted above (see chapter 2) that the initial sections of the temple sermon clearly demarcate the temple as not only the setting, but also the subject matter of the text. Even if it is concluded that there is a shift of emphasis within subsequent sections, one must do justice to this initial focus. In addition, the possibility of various legitimate ways of pointing the consonantal text and the existence of interpretations, both ancient and modern, that follow an alternative pointing (and thus an alternative interpretation) to MT suggest the need for careful consideration of the various possibilities. Unless one is prepared to justify an *a priori* privileging of the Masoretic tradition the viability and implications of a variant reading

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<sup>34</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 1:237. According to Holladay, this interpretation is reinforced by the dual focus on temple and land in the warnings of punishment in Jer. 26:4–6, yet he suggests that reasoning along these lines has been absent from discussion of this interpretative issue largely because of problematic assumptions about the stereotypical prose style of a Dtr redactor, which function to obscure what he regards as a “more subtle discourse” about both the temple and the land.

<sup>35</sup> Both McKane’s and Holladay’s interpretation, each in its own way, manages to obscure what I have suggested is a subtle ambiguity in the consonantal text and a corresponding indeterminacy with regard to the motifs of dwelling and place in the temple sermon. Whereas each of their interpretations seeks to resolve ambiguity and assign a decisive meaning to each locution regarding the presence of YHWH with his people, my own account has stressed the fluidity with which the text envisions the relationship between the dwelling of YHWH in His sanctuary, in the land, and with His people. The difficulties in McKane’s approach are perhaps most obvious as his concern to emphasize one particular dynamic leads him to downplay what ought to be regarded as a significant complementary dynamic – that is, the possession of the land motif is highlighted at the expense of the clear textual emphasis on the temple itself. While Holladay’s interpretation may seem, *prima facie*, closer to my own the crucial difference is that he is so intent on locating with precision the referent in each case that he posits a decisive shift taking place between v. 3 and v. 7. Although I have utilized an analogous concept of a shift in my interpretation as well, it is a much more fluid one which is better able to do justice to the subsequent return of emphasis upon the temple (vv. 8–11), and ultimately to the interrelationship between land and temple in the conclusion (vv. 12–15) and, indeed, throughout the passage.



must be sufficiently explored in connection with the broader conceptual concerns of the text in question.<sup>36</sup>

### *The Temple and Divine Presence*

Although the MT reading of these verses has enjoyed what is arguably the majority of scholarly support, there are noteworthy exceptions in those who have argued for the alternative vocalization instead. While the reasoning behind the witnesses of Aquila and the Vulgate (as well as the readings offered in the *BHS* apparatus and in the NRSV) might remain somewhat opaque, commentators who have followed the alternative vocalization offer some insight into the rationale for such a decision. Unfortunately, however, the justification for the decision is often limited to a brief remark about the central theme of the passage as a whole. For example, Rudolph asserts that in v. 3 “der Tempel im Mittelpunkt steht,” and so follows the alternative vocalization both there and at v. 7.<sup>37</sup> In his view, the prophet counters the assumption of his audience, namely “dass Jahwe unter allen Umständen sein Heiligtum nicht im Stich lassen werde,” with the claim “dass Jahwe nur dann in ihrer Mitte wohnen werde, wenn sie ihm durch ihren Wandel das Bleiben ermöglichen.”<sup>38</sup> Likewise, John Bright claims that the MT vocalization results from the erroneous assumption that the ambiguous מקום refers to the land rather than the temple; in contrast, he thinks it is clear in these contexts and in v. 12 that the temple is the place that is the “center of interest.”<sup>39</sup>

Arnold B. Ehrlich is another representative advocate of the emended vocalization of vv. 3 and 7, arguing that the expression במקום הזה should *not* be understood to denote the whole land. He explains:

...in this speech it is not a matter of remaining or not remaining in the land, but rather only of combatting the folk-belief that the temple imputes absolute

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<sup>36</sup> Although the present study is primarily focused upon the interpretation of the temple sermon in its canonical form in the Masoretic tradition, this approach need not disregard the significance of alternative readings and text-forms within the ancient versions. For a similar approach, see Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture*, 14-15, 44-45). As noted above, in this particular situation, the witness of Aquila, followed by the Vulgate, represents a significant alternative to the Masoretic tradition in the reception and interpretation of the consonantal text.

<sup>37</sup> Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 50.

<sup>38</sup> Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Bright, *Jeremiah*, 55.

efficacy for the protection of the national welfare. For YHWH here mainly threatens not with the exile, but rather with the destruction of the temple (cf. v. 12 and see also v. 15). For this reason, it is much better to say וְאֶשְׁכְּנָה אִתְּכֶם instead of וְאֶשְׁכְּנָה אִתְּכֶם, and to conceive of המקום הזה as an indication of the temple (cf. 1 Ki. 8:29-30, as well as the formula המקום אשר יבחר בו יהוה that is so common in Deuteronomy as an indication of the temple). Accordingly, YHWH here offers, as long as there is good conduct among his people, to maintain his residence in the temple (see v. 7).<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Rudolph, Bright and Ehrlich may be taken as representative of a legitimate alternative construal of these verses and how they function in their context.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the appeal that each of these scholars makes to what he regards as the central theme or concern of the entire passage is hardly convincing on its own as justification for emending the received text. Both Helga Weippert and William McKane challenge such readings on precisely this point, emphasizing that the motif of land possession is also prominent in the text and should not be overlooked.<sup>42</sup> Thus, rather than simply perpetuating an argument over which theme should be regarded as the most prominent, what is called for is an extended discussion of the two possible readings of vv. 3 and 7 that attempts to do justice to both emphases and to wrestle with the implications of the elements of ambiguity in the text rather than merely seeking to resolve them.

I suggest that the ambiguity of the consonantal text of the verbal forms in vv. 3 and 7, combined with the semantic ambiguity of the construction המקום הזה, coheres with a conceptual dialectic in the temple sermon between land and temple and also between the threat of exile and the theological dynamics of divine presence and absence. Whereas the MT reading decisively resolves the textual ambiguity and thus deflects attention away from what may be understood as YHWH's promise to dwell in the midst of his people, the alternative reading of vv. 3 and 7 may be understood to preserve the ambiguity of the consonantal text, suggesting an overarching concern with both temple and land throughout the sermon and highlighting the theme of

<sup>40</sup> Ehrlich, *Randglossen* (Vierter Band), 259-260 (my translation).

<sup>41</sup> See also Jenni, *Das hebräische Pi'el*, 93: "In der Tempelrede ist die Anwesenheit Gottes und nicht die Landgabe das Thema."

<sup>42</sup> Following Duhm, Nötscher, and Weiser, Helga Weippert (*Prosareden*, 27, n. 4) argues that the MT reading should be upheld in spite of the arguments of Rudolph, Ehrlich, Jenni and others, because vv. 7b and 14b clearly highlight the theme of land possession ("der Gabe des Landes"). Cf. McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:160; Overholt, *Threat of Falsehood*, 3, 17.

divine presence.<sup>43</sup> Yet, even if such a reading of the interrelated themes in the passage is accepted, the question remains whether one or the other of the alternative readings of vv. 3 and 7 is more plausible from a grammatical perspective.

### *Exploring the Possible Vocalizations: Grammar, Syntax and Implications*

In the preceding sections I have stressed that the structure of Jer. 7:1–15, as well as the interplay between the related themes of temple and land therein, justify paying closer attention to the various possibilities for vocalizing and interpreting verses 3 and 7 in the light of the broader concerns of the temple sermon. The purpose of the present section is to explore in more detail the grammatical constructions and syntactical relationships involved in each option for vocalizing the consonantal text, as well as the usage of the verbal root שכן elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, in order to determine whether such considerations might assist in determining the best reading.<sup>44</sup>

To begin with the MT reading, I reiterate that in this tradition both verses 3 and 7 feature *piel* forms of the root שכן followed by the accusative particle with a 2MP suffix (אתכם).

הִיטִיבוּ דִרְכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם וְאֶשְׁכְּנָה אִתְּכֶם בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה

*“Amend your ways and your doings, and I will allow you to dwell in this place”*

(v. 3b MT)

וְשִׁכְנֹתִי אִתְּכֶם בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה בְּאַרְצִי אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם לְמִן־עוֹלָם וְעַד־עוֹלָם

<sup>43</sup> A similar account is offered by Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice and Temple*, 89-93, who recognizes elements in the text that are suggestive of both Deuteronomistic and priestly concerns, and focuses on the motif of moral defilement rendering the sanctuary no longer efficacious for maintaining divine presence within the community.

<sup>44</sup> By “best reading” I do not mean to imply a judgment about an original text or authorial intention, but rather an evaluation of the plausibility and exegetical implications of each reading with respect to the conventions of Hebrew grammar and syntax, as well as the use of key terms elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. While I do not wish to suggest that these technical issues are ultimately separable from conceptual issues raised thus far, or from my construal of the passage as a whole, it is at least heuristically valuable to conduct this technical analysis in its own discrete section.

*“...then I will allow you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to  
your fathers for all time” (v. 7 MT)*

Although a causative verbal action is very often expressed by the *hiphil* form, it is not uncommon for the *piel* to perform a similar function.<sup>45</sup> The cohortative form of the verb in v. 3 expresses volition or intention, while the converted perfect form in v. 7 functions more explicitly as the apodosis within a conditional sentence (vv. 5-7).<sup>46</sup> Thus, the slight morphological and syntactical differences between the two verbal forms do not prevent them from functioning in essentially the same way in their respective contexts: in v. 3 the imperative (הִיחִיבוּ) followed by the cohortative (וְאִשְׁכְּנָה) implies conditionality in much the same way that the ‘if...then’ (אִם...אָז) construction in vv. 5-7 makes it explicit.<sup>47</sup>

It is not only the consonantal text of the verbal forms in vv. 3 and 7 that may be vocalized in two different ways, but also the subsequent construction אָתְּכֶם, the pointing of which will determine and/or be determined by the decisions made about the verbal forms.<sup>48</sup> If the verbs from the שָׁכַן root in vv. 3 and 7 are both vocalized as *piel*

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<sup>45</sup> Arnold and Choi, with reference to the judgment of Joüon-Muraoka (§151) that *piel* constitutes “the most elusive” of the Hebrew verbal stems, highlight the element of causation conveyed by this form: “The foregrounded interest is not the event that happens to the subject, but rather the condition attained by it. It is for all practical purposes an adjectival causation predicate” (Arnold and Choi, *Syntax*, 43). In contrast to older views of the *piel* as essentially an intensification of the *qal* stem, more recent scholarship has emphasized the relationship between *piel* and *hiphil*, as both may communicate causation, though with *patency nuance* or else *agency nuance*, respectively. See Jenni, *Das hebräische Pi’el*, esp. pp. 25-33; cf. Waltke and O’Connor, *Syntax*, 354-359, 433-436.

<sup>46</sup> To be more specific, although there are obvious morphological differences in the two verbal forms, there is little syntactical difference between their function in their respective clauses, notwithstanding the longer form of the protasis upon which v. 7 is dependent (i.e. vv. 5-6). The cohortative form in v. 3 expresses volition/intention (along the lines of ‘so that’) in a sentence that lacks an explicit indication of conditionality (i.e. אִם), whereas the vav-consecutive in v. 7 fulfills essentially the same syntactical task in connection with the explicit presence of אָז at the beginning of v. 5. See further Waltke and O’Connor, *Syntax*, 575, 636-638.

<sup>47</sup> Waltke and O’Connor distinguish between a “real conditional” clause (with the explicit ‘if...then’) and a “result clause” which would express purpose in a slightly different way (‘so that’) (*Syntax*, 636-640).

<sup>48</sup> Thus, the ambiguity discussed thus far is further amplified by the fact that the particle אָז is “one of the most difficult morphemes in Biblical Hebrew.” Not only is its use as a marker of the direct object (or the *nota accusativi*) homonymous with the preposition ‘with’, leading to potential syntactical ambiguity, but also even its function as an accusative particle is complex and has often eluded grammarians’ attempts at precise explanations. See discussion in Waltke and O’Connor, *Syntax*, 177-178. Cf. Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 49.

forms then the following construction (אתכם) must function as the direct object in the clause, as it does in the MT reading.<sup>49</sup> The use of the accusative particle with the 2MP suffix in this way is very common, and functions as a legitimate grammatical alternative to the use of a pronominal suffix attached to the verbal form itself.<sup>50</sup> To cite but one example, Exod. 6:6–8 features a sequence of verbs anticipating the events of the Exodus, each of which expresses an action that YHWH will do on behalf of the people of Israel, who are addressed consistently as the direct object with the accusative particle and a 2MP suffix.<sup>51</sup>

In the alternative vocalization, which is supported by the readings of Aquila's Greek translation (καὶ σκαηνωσω σὺν ὑμῖν) and Jerome's Vulgate (*[et] habitabo vobiscum in loco isto*), verses 3 and 7 are both pointed as *qal* forms, and the subsequent אתכם construction must therefore function as a prepositional phrase ('with' + 2MP suffix) rather than as the direct object (*n.a.* + 2MP suffix).<sup>52</sup>

הִיטִיבוּ דְרָכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם וְאֶשְׁכְּנָה אִתְּכֶם בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה

*"Amend your ways and your doings, and I will dwell with you in this place"*

(v. 3b, *emend.*)

וְשָׁכַנְתִּי אִתְּכֶם בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם לְמִן־עוֹלָם וְעַד־עוֹלָם

*"...then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for all time" (v. 7, emend.)*

Because the *qal* forms express the action of the subject rather than the subject's causing or allowing of an action with respect to another agent, the syntax of the dependent

<sup>49</sup> BDB (1015) and HALOT (1499) together corroborate the syntactical observation that the *piel* form of שָׁכַן is best understood as conveying the sense of causing, making or allowing an agent to dwell, or else perhaps setting or establishing a direct object in some place. Each of these possibilities requires a direct object for the verb.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Gen. 50:24 ("God will visit you, and bring you up" [x2]), Exod. 3:16 ("I have visited/observed you").

<sup>51</sup> The causative actions of bringing the people out (יָצָא) of Egypt, delivering them (נִצַּל), and bringing them in (בִּיאָה) to the land of promise are conveyed by *hiphil* forms, while the actions of redeeming (גָּאֵל), and taking them (לָקַח) to be His own people are expressed by *qal* forms.

<sup>52</sup> See Waltke and O'Connor, *Syntax*, 303: "Attached to a noun or preposition the suffixes are in the genitive case, while attached to a verb, אֶת or הֶנָּה they are in the accusative function."

clause in both cases must be understood as the conjugated verb (indicating both subject and verbal action), followed by two prepositional phrases. The emphasis is on YHWH's own promise to dwell, and this action is modified as dwelling "with you," and then specified by the location "in this place."<sup>53</sup> As above, the distinction between the cohortative of v. 3 and the converted perfect in v. 7 remains the same in this reading, and thus there are still good reasons to take the two forms as fulfilling roughly the same syntactical function in their respective contexts.

### *Dwelling in the Hebrew Bible: Linguistic Usage*

The precise combination of terms found in either vocalization is unattested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, yet a detailed investigation of verbal and grammatical parallels suggests that there are good reasons for adopting the emended vocalization. Although forms of the root שכן occur in the *qal*, *piel* and *hiphil* binyanim, the closest parallels to the verbal forms in this text are attested in *qal*.<sup>54</sup> The *hiphil* form of this verb is used periodically to speak of one agent causing another to dwell or to be positioned in a particular place.<sup>55</sup> Although the *piel* form is attested, and may be understood in causative terms not unlike the *hiphil* (see above), the verb does not occur in the *piel* form with people as the direct object (in the sense of an agent causing people to dwell somewhere).<sup>56</sup> The *piel* forms are most frequently found in the infinitive construct form,

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<sup>53</sup> The preposition "with" accompanied by a 2MP suffix often functions as a kind of standalone prepositional phrase, modifying a verb, as in Gen 9:9, Num. 1:5 and 1 Sam. 23:23 (see also 2 Kgs. 17:38; Jer. 29:16; Ezek. 20:36). Interestingly, it can also have a sense of an agent (often YHWH) doing something to someone (see, e.g., 1 Sam. 12:7; 2 Sam. 2:6; Jer. 5:18, 21:5, 37:10; Ezek. 20:44). It can even be used to denote God's presence: e.g. "I am/will be with you" (Jer. 42:11; Am. 5:14; Hag. 1:13; 2:4). In Hag. 2:5 Israel is addressed with the combined notions of God making a covenant/promise "with you" and that of his spirit being "in your midst". It is not unheard of for this construction to even have a sense of being "among you" as well: Josh. 23:7, 12 (*those that remain among you*). Moreover, there are occasions on which this construction is used with verbal forms related to the action of dwelling, living, or settling (though not with the שכן root), as in Gen. 34:16 (*we will dwell* [ישב *qal*] *with you*) and Lev. 19:34 (*The stranger who resides/sojourns* [גור *qal*] *with you*). cf. Num. 9:14; 15:14, 16; Ezek. 47:22.

<sup>54</sup> On the root and its usage see HALOT, 4:1496-1499; BDB, 1014-1015. See also discussions of connotations related to theologies of divine presence in biblical texts and in cognate ANE literature in Mettinger, *Dethronement* 90-97, Sommer *Bodies of God*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> e.g. Gen. 3:24; Job. 11:14; Ps. 7:6 [Eng. 7:5]; Ezek. 32:4. It occurs with the collective people of Israel as subject, setting up the tabernacle (Josh. 18:1), and also with YHWH as subject, causing the people to dwell in tribes (Ps. 78:55).

<sup>56</sup> BDB (1015) and HALOT (4:1499) together corroborate the syntactical observation that the *piel* form of שכן is best understood as conveying the sense of causing, making or allowing an agent

within the Deuteronomistic formula that speaks of YHWH causing his name to dwell, or to be established, in a particular place (e.g. Deut. 12:11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2; Neh. 1:9).<sup>57</sup>

The two important exceptions to this dominant usage are the *piel* perfect form which occurs in the temple sermon itself (Jer. 7:12) and the *piel* infinitive construct form in Num. 14:30.<sup>58</sup>

Jer. 7:12

כִּי לְכוּ-נָא אֶל-מְקוֹמִי אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁילֹו אֲשֶׁר שָׁכַנְתִּי שְׁמִי שָׁם בְּרֹאשׁוֹנָה וְרָאוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ מִפְּנֵי רָעַת עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Num. 14:30

אִם-אֲתֵם תֵּבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת-יָדִי לְשַׁכֵּן אֹתְכֶם בָּהּ כִּי אִם-כָּלֵב בֶּן-נִפְנֶה וַיהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נוּנִן

The former occurrence may be understood as a variation on, or perhaps an allusion to, the Deuteronomistic name formula, and so the use of the *piel* form should be regarded as bearing the influence of that idiom and translated accordingly, despite its use of a finite verb instead of an infinitival form.<sup>59</sup> The latter text (Num. 14:30) does constitute an instance of the *piel* form of the root שָׁכַן in a context that is directly concerned with the motif of YHWH's gift and the Israelites' possession of the land; however, the verb occurs in an infinitival form and so its value for determining the most plausible

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to dwell, or else perhaps setting or establishing a direct object in some place. Each of these possibilities requires a direct object for the verb.

<sup>57</sup> Note the discussion in Richter, *Deuteronomistic History*, 98-105. While her discussion of Akkadian parallels to the Deuteronomistic formula is illuminating, Richter's insistence on the MT reading of Jer. 7:3, 7 is unconvincing, relying primarily on a repeated assertion that the issue in the text as a whole concerns the "revocation of land tenure" (pp. 92-93, 100) and a critique of Holladay's speculative reasoning (100-101), which I also find wanting. Both issues have already been addressed in the present study (see above).

<sup>58</sup> Ps. 78:60 may constitute an exception as well, but, like Jer. 3, 7, its vocalization is disputed. For many interpreters, the decision made about one of these instances will affect the position taken on the other, not least because they share both an ambiguous consonantal text and unique allusions to the fate of Shiloh.

<sup>59</sup> As such, the verb in 7:12 is best understood as speaking of YHWH "placing" his name or causing it to be established, and does not constitute the most useful parallel for determining the preferable vocalization of vv. 3 and 7, despite its literary proximity. See the useful discussion of the formula and its variations in Richter, *Deuteronomistic History*, 98-103. In contrast to my interpretation of Jer. 7, Richter is committed to reading vv. 3 and 7 in the light of v. 12 (90-93).

reading of the consonantal text of Jer. 7:3 and 7 is limited. The construction in Num. 14:30 might appear to be an especially striking parallel, especially given that it features the same 2MP suffix attached to the direct object marker as is found in Jer. 7:3, 7; yet, this constitutes a distinct grammatical and syntactical construction. The argument of this section is *not* that the root שכן cannot be used in the *piel* to refer to YHWH establishing his people in the land or causing them to dwell there, but instead simply that the most plausible reading of the forms in vv. 3 and 7, on the basis of close linguistic parallels, is in their *qal* vocalizations. Despite these two variations, then, it is clear that the most common usage of שכן in the *piel* is to speak of causing YHWH's name to dwell, and when it is used with the people of Israel as the indirect object it occurs in the infinitive construct form rather than as a finite verb as in Jeremiah 7.

In its *qal* forms, the verb שכן may be used to speak of people living in a particular place (e.g. Gen. 14:13; Job 4:19; Jer. 17:6), of nations dwelling or settling in a region (e.g. Judg. 5:17; Jer. 25:24; 46:26; 48:28), or even to denote the dwelling place of animals (Ezek. 17:23 [x2]; 31:13) and personified attributes, such as wisdom (Prov. 8:12) or wickedness (Job 11:14). More important for the present discussion are those cases in which the dwelling of Israel as a nation is in view. The verb occurs in *qal* forms to denote the place that YHWH has appointed for Israel to dwell (2 Sam. 7:10; 1 Chron. 17:9), and also to speak of the direct action of Israel's possessing and dwelling within the land.<sup>60</sup> In addition, these forms of the verb are often used with YHWH as subject, to speak of either YHWH himself, his glory (כבוד), or the cloud (ענן) dwelling in a particular place. YHWH is envisioned as dwelling "on high" or "in a high and holy place" (Isa. 33:5, 16; 57:15), in the midst of the people (Num. 35:34; 1 Ki. 6:13), in their camp (Num. 5:3), and in the land, or holy city (e.g. Pss. 74:2; 135:21; Isa. 8:18; Joel 4:17, 21).<sup>61</sup> His כבוד settles upon Mt. Sinai and dwells in the land (Exod. 24:16; Ps. 85:10), and in a similarly symbolic indication of divine presence, the ענן settles down upon the

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<sup>60</sup> Perhaps especially significant in comparison with the temple sermon are occurrences in which the motif of Israel dwelling in the land in safety or security is also present; see Pss. 15:1; 37:3, 27, 29; Jer. 23:6; 33:16. Again, however, it should be emphasized that the present argument does not deny the presence of this motif, but rather maintains that it is interrelated in Jer. 7 with the theme of YHWH's presence in the temple.

<sup>61</sup> In my view, these last three concepts are so often interrelated that they should not be too neatly separated. See for example, the parallelism operative in Num. 35:34.



tabernacle and in the wilderness (Exod. 40:35; Num. 9:17-22; 10:12). Moreover, the dwelling of YHWH may be understood to take place via the sanctuary (e.g. Exod. 25:8; 29:45-46), and the tabernacle itself may function as the subject of the verb, personified as the agent dwelling among the people (Lev. 16:16; Josh. 22:19).<sup>62</sup>

Most significant for the present discussion are those instances in which the *qal* 1CS form of the verb occurs in imperfect or else in perfect, vav-consecutive forms with YHWH as subject, in a way closely analogous to what is proposed by the alternative tradition of vocalization being considered here. There are two instances of an almost identical *qal* cohortative form suggested for v. 3 in the alternative vocalization, attested in Psalm 55:7 (וְאֶשְׁכֶּנֶה) and 139:9 (אֶשְׁכֶּנֶה).<sup>63</sup> Although the usefulness of these passages for the present analysis is limited, they do offer evidence of this consonantal text being vocalized in the *qal* stem in a way that is not attested for the *piel*.<sup>64</sup> More significantly, the *qal* converted perfect vocalization proposed for v. 7 is twice attested in Zech. 2:14–15 (Eng. vv. 10–11) in a passage that involves a very similar promise of divine presence (וְשִׁכְנִיתִי בְּתוֹכְךָ ‘and I will dwell in your midst’ [x2]). Zech. 8:1–18 speaks of YHWH returning to Zion, and involves an intriguing shift from the promise of YHWH *himself* returning to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem (וְשִׁכְנִיתִי בְּתוֹךְ יְרוּשָׁלַם, Zech. 8:3) to the promise that he will bring *his people* to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem (וְהִבֵּאתִי אֹתָם וְשִׁכְנִי בְּתוֹךְ יְרוּשָׁלַם, Zech. 8:8). Clearly what is implied is much the same as what is explicit in Zech. 2, namely that YHWH’s dwelling place would be both in the midst of his people and in the holy city, the latter referent also being the dwelling place of the people.

Ezekiel 43:1–12 describes a vision of the כבוד of the LORD filling the temple, followed by a message regarding the temple, given by YHWH to Ezekiel. In vv. 6–9 we find a sequence of two forms of the שכן root that mirror the two forms of the verbs in Jer. 7:3 and 7 proposed by the alternative tradition of vocalization:

<sup>62</sup> In connection with the texts concerning the tabernacle, it is often noted that the nominal form משכן is derived from the root שכן.

<sup>63</sup> There are slight variations: the latter of these two examples does not feature the conjunctive *vav*; in addition, the cohortative is pointed with a *holem* over the radical כ in Ps. 55:7, but with a *sheva* in Ps. 139:9 (cf. Rudolph’s proposed emendation in the apparatus to Jer. 7:3 BHS).

<sup>64</sup> These are poetic passages. One features a speaker who imagines taking flight and dwelling or resting like a bird (וְאֶשְׁכֶּנֶה וְאֶעֱפֶה וְאֶשְׁכֶּנֶה); the other, dwelling at the ends of the sea (אֶשְׂא כְּנַפְי־שָׁחַר אֶשְׁכֶּנֶה בְּאַחֲרֵית יָם).

While the man was standing beside me, I heard one speaking to me out of the temple: and he said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where *I will dwell in the midst* of the people of Israel (אֶשְׁכֵּן-שָׁם בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל) forever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their harlotry, and by the dead bodies of their kings by setting their threshold by my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them. They have defiled my holy name by their abominations which they have committed, so I have consumed them in my anger. Now let them put away their idolatry and the dead bodies of their kings far from me, and *I will dwell in their midst* (וְאֶשְׁכְּנֵתִי בְּתוֹכָם) forever. (Ezek. 43:6–9 RSV).

This passage features almost precisely the same sequence of a *qal* imperfect 1CS form of the verb followed by a *qal* converted perfect 1CS.<sup>65</sup> Although the אֶתְכֶם construction is not present, it is reasonable to assert that the בְּתוֹךְ locution may understood in conjunction with the שָׁן root to convey much the same sense. Thus, while this passage by no means constitutes an exact parallel, nor should citing it be taken *on its own* as a convincing argument for the adoption of the alternative vocalization, it is suggestive of the grammatical and syntactical legitimacy of this reading, as well as its plausibility, given the closely related subject matter. Although the precise phrase "I will dwell with you in this place" is not attested, both Zechariah 2 and Ezekiel 43 feature very similar *qal* forms of the שָׁן root, combined with a prepositional phrase that corresponds closely to אִתְּכֶם ('with you'), in the context of promises that envision the return of YHWH's presence to Jerusalem/Zion and a restored temple.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, in these texts, as in Jeremiah's temple sermon, the emphasis on divine presence in the temple does not rule out, but rather enhances, the complementary emphasis on the city of Jerusalem and the people of Israel dwelling in the land.

The present section has explored the various implications of following the emended vocalization for vv. 3 and 7, and thus interpreting the promise of the temple

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<sup>65</sup> The verb in v. 7 is not in the cohortative (compare Jer. 7:3), but this distinction does not greatly affect the significance of the parallel. Whereas the cohortative in Jer. 7:3 serves the syntactical function of expressing volition or intention in relation to the imperative that precedes it, the imperfect form in Ezek. 43:7 simply functions as part of a divine promise in the future tense. Although there is no element of implicit or explicit conditionality in Ezek. 43:7, it is worth noting that v. 9 features what may be understood as an implied conditional promise that is very similar to Jer. 7:3.

<sup>66</sup> Although the obvious difference between these two future, eschatological promises and the presumably more imminent scope of that of Jeremiah 7, should be kept in mind, the conceptual overlap between these three passages that envisage YHWH dwelling among his people via the temple remains significant.

sermon as envisioning the dwelling of YHWH with his people. The *qal* forms of שָׁכַן are much more common than *piel* or *hiphil*, but the latter do occur and often in contexts which are noticeably similar to our subject matter here; moreover, both forms of the אֶתְכֶם construction are well-attested and would fit syntactically depending on the vocalization of the verbal forms.<sup>67</sup> Although both readings involve legitimate grammatical and syntactical constructions, only the alternative vocalization can claim textual support on the basis of similar verbal forms elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, including some that articulate closely analogous promises of YHWH to dwell in the midst of his people (see Ezek. 43:7–9 and Zech. 2:14–15a [EVV vv. 10–11a]; cf. Zech. 8:3, 8; cf. Ps. 55:7; 139:9).

I acknowledge that the notion of a divine promise to “dwell with you” does not occur in the Hebrew Bible in precisely the form that the alternative vocalization suggests: however, there are close analogies in the notion of YHWH’s dwelling “with you” envisioned by a different verbal root (יָשַׁב), as well as the motif of YHWH dwelling “in the midst” (בְּתוֹךְ) of his people.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the reading of this passage that I have proposed is not only perfectly legitimate in the light of grammatical and conceptual parallels, but also allows for an interpretation of the passage as a whole that reflects the ambiguity inherent in the consonantal text. Whereas following the MT vocalization closes down possible resonances of the dual motifs operative in the text of Jer. 7:1–15, limiting the possible significance of the divine promise to a matter of land possession or exile, an interpretation based on the emended vocalization highlights the

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<sup>67</sup> One might argue that the clear-cut *piel* imperfect form of the same verb in v. 12 and the *n.a.* with 2MP suffix in v. 15 (*‘I will cast you out...’*) together lend weight to the MT vocalization of vv. 3 and 7. However, it should be pointed out in the first place that there is no reason the two constructions of אֶתְכֶם that we have considered cannot both occur in the same context. For example, in Jer. 2:7 the construction is used as direct object (I brought you [*hiph.*]), and then in 2:9 it occurs as the prepositional phrase *‘with you’*. Second, if the usage in v. 12 is drawing upon the Deuteronomistic formula regarding the dwelling of YHWH’s name, it is unsurprising that it might take a different form than the distinct-yet-related promises of YHWH himself dwelling with His people in verses 3 and 7. Note the way that Josh. 18 speaks of causing the tabernacle to dwell (*hiphil*) and then chap. 22 speaks of where it dwells (*qal*).

<sup>68</sup> The different roots occur in Gen 34:16, Deut. 23:17 [ENG v. 16] both with יָשַׁב and Ps. 5:5 [ENG 5:4] with sojourn (גִּיר). Only Deuteronomy 23:17 has the same *‘with you’* 2MP construction, the others have a singular suffix). The motif of YHWH dwelling in the midst (בְּתוֹךְ) of his people/Israel/Zion occurs in Exod. 25:8; 29:45–46; Num. 35:34; 1 Ki. 6:13; Ezek. 43:7, 9; Zech. 2; Zech. 8.

theme of YHWH's presence with His people within the passage without necessarily contradicting or diminishing the theme of the people continuing to dwell in the land.

### *Section 2: The Warning of the Temple Sermon (vv. 7:4, 8–11)*

Thus far in my exegesis of Jeremiah's temple sermon I have argued that vv. 5–7 may be read as an extension of v. 3 and that the central divine promise of the temple sermon, introduced in verse 3 and reiterated in v. 7, may be understood as more directly concerned with matters of divine presence than has typically been recognized by interpreters. In the present section I will suggest that verses 8–11 may similarly be read as an extension of the prohibition first given in v. 4, thereby both serving as an explication of v. 4 and also functioning as a complement to vv. 5–7. Additionally, drawing upon the argument made in chapter 2, I will maintain that the hypothesis of a conflict between the Jeremiah tradition and a putative doctrine of Zion's inviolability does not represent the most promising approach to understanding the concerns of this text. I argue instead that the prophet's polemic is comprehensible without recourse to this hypothesis and that a preferable, alternative line of interpretation is to explore intertextual resonances with Ezekiel 8–11, as a way of both providing additional insight into the theological dynamics of divine presence and absence that are operative within Jeremiah's temple sermon.

#### *Words of Deception, Hidden Abominations*

##### *The Textual Problem of Verse 4*

Numerous proposals have been put forward regarding the best way to understand the textual difficulties of verse 4, but scholars have failed to achieve anything close to a consensus. The beginning of the verse is relatively unproblematic, as the *hiphil* imperative of v. 3 is here complemented by a prohibition so that, in conjunction with the positive command to amend or reform (הִשְׁבִּירוּ) their actions, the people are also negatively warned not to trust (אַל-תִּבְטְחוּ לָכֶם) in words of deception, or falsehood. However, the second part of the verse appears to give an example, perhaps even a specific citation, of the particular deceptive words that one should not place confidence in, and it is initially unclear what exactly it is about these words that makes them

deceptive or false. Obviously, the prophet's point cannot be that the place in which he and his audience are standing is not the temple of YHWH, since vv. 1–3 have made it clear that it is.<sup>69</sup> More significantly, the apparent citation of the deceptive words involves a puzzling syntactical form, in which a simple construct pair (היכל יהוה) is repeated three times, and then juxtaposed with an apparent demonstrative pronoun in the plural (המה). While a verbless clause such as this is by no means uncommon in biblical Hebrew, and a simple form of the “to be” verb may often be supplied in an English translation, one still faces the difficulty of what it would mean to claim that the temple (*singular*) of YHWH, referred to three times, is/are “these” (המה).<sup>70</sup>

It has often been suggested that what is referred to here is the entire temple complex, consisting of a number of buildings and so properly referred to with the plural demonstrative pronoun.<sup>71</sup> Although there are potentially analogous OT texts that *might* support the notion that the temple would be referred to in such a way (e.g. Ps. 84:1–3; 2 Chr. 8:11), this sort of reference is rare enough and distinct enough from the construction of v. 4 to remain unconvincing.<sup>72</sup> An alternative proposal that has sometimes been suggested is that the consonants הֵם and הָ may be understood as a scribal error or some other form of textual corruption in which most of the phrase המקום הזה has been omitted.<sup>73</sup> Jon D. Levenson takes a similar approach, but he sees הֵם

<sup>69</sup> See Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 59. It is worth noting that it is only in this apparent citation of the deceptive words that the term היכל appears in this text; with this one, tripartite exception, the temple is referred to as בית throughout.

<sup>70</sup> The OG version does not feature the same ambiguity as MT since the dual citation of the deceptive words concludes with an indicative verb in the singular (ἐστίν) rather than the demonstrative pronoun: μὴ πεποιθατε ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ἐπὶ λόγοις ψευδέσιν ὅτι τὸ παράπαν οὐκ ὠφελήσουσιν ὑμᾶς λέγοντες ναὸς κυρίου ναὸς κυρίου ἐστίν. Of course, whether this should be taken as an interpretative move to clarify an ambiguous received Hebrew text or evidence of an alternative textual tradition that featured a less difficult construction will depend on broader judgments about the compositional history of the book and probably cannot be conclusively established one way or the other.

<sup>71</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1:242; Lundbom *Jeremiah* 1–20, 462; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 55. Reimer, “Triplets,” 211 notes that H. Torczyner (1925) was the first to suggest this interpretation.

<sup>72</sup> Needless to say, there is no comparable instance of the term היכל being referred to in this way. In Ps. 84:1–3, the references are to the “dwelling-places” of YHWH (משכנותיך) and his “courts” (הצרות), so the terminology used is explicitly plural; likewise, although 2 Chron. 8:11 does use the same plural demonstrative pronoun (המה), it appears to function as a general reference to locations into which the ark of YHWH has come, rather than referring pronominally to a singular noun.

<sup>73</sup> So, *BHS* apparatus. Cf. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 50.

as a *deliberate* scribal abbreviation of this phrase rather than an inadvertent error.<sup>74</sup> The difficulty with the latter view is that there is a lack of comparative evidence, not only for a similar abbreviation for this fairly common phrase, but also for a similar practice of abbreviating phrases in a comparable fashion.

A.B. Ehrlich proposes an emendation, reading the interrogative מה in the place of המה, and suggesting that the extra ה is the result of reduplication from the preceding phrase,היכל יהוה. He explains,

היכל יהוה מה forms a complete sentence, which no longer depends upon לאמר, but rather resumes YHWH's speech. Against the magical-chant (*Zauberwort*) היכל יהוה, which the Israelites kept speaking, YHWH turned whilst he said: *what* is the Temple? In other words, what is its significance as a factor for the protection of the national welfare? What is meant is that the Temple only has its significance as a dwelling place of YHWH, but that YHWH is only able to keep it as a dwelling place if his people are obedient and justice and righteousness is practiced.<sup>75</sup>

However creative, this proposal too remains unconvincing. The interrogative clause, *ex hypothesi*, would not only involve unusual syntax, but also would seem to lack a conjunction or some explicit indication of the intended contrast with the preceding *Zauberwort*.<sup>76</sup>

The lack of consensus itself suggests that each of the proposals listed is unlikely to provide the best explanation for the present form of Jer. 7:4. More importantly, it is my contention that scholars have not explored sufficiently the possibility that there are dynamics and motifs internal to this passage that might explain the meaning and function of the tripartite phrase in a more satisfactory way than the problematic and conjectural views explored above. Carolyn Sharp, likewise, remains unconvinced by

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<sup>74</sup> Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 166, n. 25. Cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 207. Lundbom (*Jeremiah 1–20*, 462) resists this hypothesis on the basis that the same phrase is used three more times in vv. 3–7 without the abbreviation (cf. Reimer, “Triplets,” 211); however, it should be pointed out that the other instances of the phrase feature the preposition ו whereas v. 4 has only the definite article. Additionally, if the tripartite phrase is to be understood as some sort of citation, then one might reasonably expect that even if it features a unique form of abbreviation, the text that is citing it would not necessarily feel obliged to be consistent with that abbreviation.

<sup>75</sup> Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 260 (my trans, emphasis added).

<sup>76</sup> Ehrlich cites Num. 16:11 as an analogy for this use of מה, however, it should be pointed out that the full idiom in that context is מה-הוא, that it functions syntactically at the beginning of a clause, rather than at the end, and that it does feature an adversative conjunction, distinguishing it from the preceding context.

many of the hypotheses discussed above, and she seeks to account for the difficult textual phenomenon by interpreting it in the light of its wider context.<sup>77</sup> Resisting the pervasive assumption that *המה* must somehow function as a demonstrative, Sharp suggests instead an appositional relationship between the term *המה* and the threefold *היכל* expression.<sup>78</sup> She explains, “The syntax of 7:4 may be difficult to understand but is by no means grammatically impossible. A persuasive exegetical reading should account for the semantic correspondence between the multiple occurrences of the phrase *היכל יהוה* and the plural status of *המה* in some way.”<sup>79</sup> Her proposal for such an account is dependent upon her larger thesis regarding the conflict between ideological allegiances in the post-exilic political situation. Noting the prominence of the *שקר* theme, and the way it often is related to both priests and prophets throughout the book, Sharp suggests that:

the plural *המה* is indicating that the people have been trusting either the cult officials of the false prophets because of the identification of their authority with the Temple, a trust that the author of 7:4 considers drastically misplaced. The quotation in 7:4 (marked by *לאמר*) is not a quotation of the content of the deceptive words themselves but is instead a reference to the gullible people’s citing of the authority of the speakers of the deceptive words, an authority conveyed by the association of those speakers with the Temple. The specific thrust of 7:4 is not the presumed inviolability of the Temple as such but that people have been heeding the wrong advisors, justifying their decision by pointing to the speakers’ association with the Temple.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, for Sharp, the plural demonstrative pronoun need not be explained away as a text-critical problem, nor does it somehow refer to the temple as a plurality, but it refers to a group of people and thereby reflects the redactional and ideological tension that pervades the book. She explains: “This, then, is an indictment of the people for trusting the *שלום* prophets and the priests under their control.”<sup>81</sup> Sharp’s approach to this verse is initially appealing in its refusal to settle for conjectural hypotheses and in its stated confidence in the possibility of a legitimate grammatical explanation for the

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<sup>77</sup> See Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 45-47.

<sup>78</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 45.

<sup>79</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 46.

<sup>80</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 47. According to Sharp, “The oft-expressed view that the inviolability of the Temple is the focus of the misplaced confidence of the people is not necessarily clear from the text, which after all does not quite say what proponents of the inviolability theory would need it to say” (45, citing Levine, “Prophetic Attitudes,” as a recent nuanced expression of this view).

<sup>81</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 47.

received text; however, her conclusion ultimately amounts to yet another questionable theory, one which depends, to some extent, upon one's willingness to accept her more comprehensive reconstruction of the book of Jeremiah's compositional development.

By contrast, David J. Reimer has offered a compelling and surprisingly straightforward proposal for understanding the text of Jer. 7:4, taking up Sharp's challenge of arriving at a persuasive grammatical and syntactical explanation without resorting to conjectural hypotheses. In a recent article, Reimer examines four cases of "three-fold repetition" in prophetic texts, including Isa. 6:3; Ezek. 21:32; and Jer. 7:4 and 22:29, arguing that it is more helpful to understand this literary phenomenon as a way of communicating "emphasis and intensification" as opposed to the more common construal of it as a "quasi-superlative" syntactical feature.<sup>82</sup> Regarding the four texts as a whole, he explains, "In each case, the tripled term provides a focal point for the judgment stated or implied in the wider context."<sup>83</sup>

With respect to Jer. 7:4 in particular, Reimer argues that *המה* should indeed be understood as a demonstrative pronoun, but with its antecedent construed as *דברי השקר* rather than the *היכל*.<sup>84</sup> Having pointed out the problems with various other proposals (i.e. some of those discussed above), Reimer puts forward his own argument, the central thrust of which is worth quoting at length:

A more plausible reading takes its cue from some of the observations seen in this brief survey. The three-fold saying is unusual, but the use of *המה* is not. One way of explaining the syntax of the verse works this way: v. 4a warns against trusting deceptive speech, ending in *לאמר* which merely serves to introduce the direct speech following; what follows in v. 4b has the character of a nominal clause with the three-fold recitation of direct speech, the predicate for which the final *המה* is the subject. In translation: "Do not trust in deceptive words: they are 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'" *המה*, then, functions somewhat like a resumptive pronoun with its antecedent *דברי השקר*

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<sup>82</sup> Reimer, "Triplets," 215.

<sup>83</sup> Reimer, "Triplets," 215. It should perhaps also be noted that Reimer is not content with merely the broad notion of "emphasis" as an explanation (cf. 206), and he is careful to note differences between each of the instances in their respective contexts...

<sup>84</sup> Reimer, "Triplets," 212. In two footnotes, Reimer notes the intriguing suggestion of Alan Corré ("*elle hēmma* = sic") that *המה* might be understood, in Jer. 7:4 and other texts in Jeremiah, to function in an analogous way to '*sic*.' in contemporary scholarship, that is, as a way of indicating that a preceding citation is not a case of dittography or some other inadvertent error, but is in fact what is meant to be read. Although Reimer's argument is somewhat similar, he points out that it is less hypothetical and grounded instead in "the typical syntax of the independent pronoun..." (see 212, n. 41; cf. 211, n. 35).



from v. 4a (cf. Est 9:1 *fin*; also in Jer 32:8 *fin*), but in a separate clause (cf. Ps 55:22; Prov 18:8).<sup>85</sup>

What makes Reimer's proposal for the understanding of this verse so compelling is that it offers a straightforward and plausible explanation for what appears to be an awkward Hebrew construction, dispensing with the need for many of the problematic hypotheses sketched above. In addition to advocating Reimer's explanation, I also suggest that close attention to the way in which vv. 8–11 take up and expand upon v. 4 offers further insight into this potentially difficult verse.

### *The Nature of the Warning*

If one is prepared to follow my proposal for structuring the flow of thought in the temple sermon as a whole, then the content of vv. 8–11 should provide further insight into the nature of the deceptive words first introduced in v. 4. As explained above, the prohibition against trusting such speech in v. 4 is complemented by the accusation of v. 8 that this is precisely what the people have been doing, and in the latter case, the דברי השקר are modified by the infinitival clause לבלתי הועיל.<sup>86</sup> Similar phrases occur elsewhere in the book of Jeremiah in conjunction with the notion of falsehood (see Jer. 16:19; 23:32), and sometimes this terminology (i.e. the negative particle combined with forms of יעל) is also used to critique the worthlessness of engaging in idolatry, which may be understood as a particular form of falsehood or deception as well (see Jer. 2:8, 11). Whether the infinitive construct in v. 8 refers to the words themselves being of no profit, or to the fact that trusting in them will be of not advantage to the audience, or the phrase should simply be taken as the impersonal "to no avail" (so NRSV), the message is clear that the words cited in v. 4 and referenced again in v. 8 are not so

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<sup>85</sup> Reimer, "Triplets," 212. A potential weakness in this reading involves the function of לאמר. Reimer appeals to *HALOT*, suggesting that the term may be understood to function as a colon; however, leaving it untranslated is a somewhat unconventional interpretation of this formulaic indicator of direct speech.

<sup>86</sup> Lundbom (*Jeremiah 1–20*, 465) resists what he characterizes as the common assumption that the reference to deceptive words in v. 8 applies to the same words as v. 4, implying that the deceptive words about the temple in v. 4 should be distinguished from the deceptive words of self-assured safety in v. 10 (introduced by v. 8). Yet, as he himself notes, the single Hebrew word used in v. 10 (נצלני) suggests that this is "one of many words the people are speaking presumptuously" (ibid.). In my own view, it is preferable to understand v. 8 as expanding upon what is introduced in v. 4 and to regard both 'citations' of the content of the deceptive words as paradigmatic of the kind of message that is being trusted, rather than attempting to carefully delimit which words are referred to at each point.

much false in the sense of being incorrect or inaccurate so much as they are self-deceptive and detrimental to those who place their trust in them.<sup>87</sup>

As in the case of v. 4, the content of the deceptive words cited in vv. 8–11 require more nuance than simply regarding them as false; that is, what makes these words deceptive is not merely that their opposite is true (i.e. the people are not, in fact, safe) but rather that they encourage a belief, and a corresponding set of practices, that is misguided. Although this observation might initially appear to give credence to the hypothesis that the temple sermon constitutes a critique of the doctrine of inviolability, there are good reasons to resist such a conclusion. In the light of the above argument concerning elements of ambiguity and the dual focus on land possession and divine presence in the temple sermon as a whole, I suggest that the citation of the peoples' central claim, נַצְּלוּ (v. 10), may be understood in a comparably flexible way. On the one hand, the term נַצַּל is frequently associated with the notion of protection or deliverance in the context of military threat, which might suggest that what is envisioned is something along the lines of the inviolability thesis (i.e. the people imagine the temple and city to be invulnerable to enemy attack); on the other hand, the logic of vv. 8–11 strongly suggests that what is deceptive about these words is closely tied to the effect that the peoples' behavior has upon their continued ability to engage with YHWH in the context of his temple.<sup>88</sup>

Verses 9–10 feature a sequence of six infinitive absolutes, governed by the interrogative particle at the beginning of the clause and followed by two converted perfect verbal forms (וּבִאתֶם וְעַמְדֶתֶם), signaling both a consequential relationship between these latter verbal actions and the preceding infinitives and also a sense of frequency,

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<sup>87</sup> It should be noted that in the OG of v. 4 the phrase ὅτι τὸ παράπαν οὐκ ὠφελήσουσιν modifies the deceptive words, where as in v. 8 the phrase ὅθεν οὐκ ὠφελήθησθε is directed toward the audience. In v. 8 MT the *hiphil* infinitive construct may be understood to have the same subject as the main verb (as in v. 8 OG) or to modify the object of the main verb (as in v. 4 OG), or it could simply be impersonal, which would fit well with the particle of non-existence, בִּלְתִּי.

<sup>88</sup> Moberly (*Prophecy and Discernment*, 60–62) nicely captures both themes, emphasizing both that the words of deception are suggestive of the peoples' presumed safety from military threat and the potential that cultic abuses might lead to YHWH's presence itself becoming a danger. Cf. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice and Temple*, 89–93.

or continued action.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the phrasing communicates a sense of incredulity at the notion that the people would engage in the immoral and idolatrous behaviors listed, and then presume to stand in the presence of YHWH in his temple (לפני בבית הזה), assured of their safety (נצלנו) despite their continued practice of abominations (כל-התועבות האלה). Such actions, and the complacent presumption attached to them, provoke the further rhetorical question of v. 11, in which YHWH suggests that his sanctuary is being treated as though it were a hideout for thieves (מערת פרצים). In answer to the mistaken belief that their abominations may be hidden from the deity in the context of such a hideout, YHWH proclaims that he *sees/has seen* everything that is going on (אני ראה). Taken as whole, then, this latter section (vv. 8–11) seems to fill out and explicate the otherwise ambiguous v. 4 in a way that stresses the self-deceptive belief on the part of the people that they may engage in all manner of idolatry and injustice and yet still enjoy the presence of YHWH in the temple (ובאתם ועמדתם לפני בבית הזה), as if he somehow cannot see what is going on.

### *Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and Ezekiel's Temple Visions*

In the light of my arguments that Jeremiah's temple sermon is concerned with both temple and land, and that the conditional promise of vv. 3 and 5–7 may be understood to raise the issue of continued divine presence in the midst of the people (mediated by the temple), it is striking that the complementary critique of the people's actions in vv. 4 and 8–11 would use the language of abomination (תועבות) to describe the people's actions (v. 10), and then also juxtapose their belief that they can hide in a (presumably dark) cave with YHWH's affirmation that he sees (ראה) everything that is going on (v. 11). I suggest that such thematic connections between the practice of various abominations in the context of the temple, coupled with the mistaken and self-deceptive belief that YHWH is not aware of such behavior, is evocative of Ezekiel 8–11, not least in light of the conceptual overlap that has been stressed with regard to the

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<sup>89</sup> See GKC, §§ 112o, 113ee, and Joüon-Muraoka, §§ 119 s, 123 w for discussions of both the consequential relationship between the *w-qatali* forms and the infinitive absolutes, and the infinitives having a sense of frequency. See also Joüon-Muraoka, §161 b for the suggestion that the interrogatives here may signal not only rhetorical questions but perhaps also an exclamatory, accusatory sense.

theology of divine presence and the corresponding threat of divine absence.<sup>90</sup> More specifically, it is striking that both Jeremiah's temple sermon and Ezekiel's temple vision connect the problem of committing various abominations (תועבות) in and around the divine sanctuary with the mistaken belief of the people that they can hide their actions from the sight (ראה) of YHWH.<sup>91</sup> The evocative pictures of a cave of thieves (Jer. 7:11) and of the dark rooms of one's imagination (Ezek. 8:12) are both suggestive of the irony with which people imagine that their actions may be safely concealed from the presence of God. One can imagine the self-deceptive refrain of Ezek. 8:12 and 9:9: "YHWH does not see us" (אתנו ואין יהוה ראה), being answered by the emphatic response of an indignant YHWH in Jer. 7:11b: "*Behold, I myself see, says YHWH!*" (אנכי הנה ראיתי) (נאם־יהוה).<sup>92</sup>

Not unlike the reading of Jer. 7:1–15 that I have presented thus far, the "departure narrative" in Ezek. 8–11 involves considerable ambiguity with regard to the motif of divine presence and the way it appears to be affected by human action.<sup>93</sup> The movements of the כבוד in this section are closely related to the other vision sequences in the book, as explicitly indicated by the repeated internal references to its previous

<sup>90</sup> For discussions of divine presence and absence in the book of Ezekiel, see especially Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, Tuell, "Divine Presence and Absence," Strong, "God's *Kābôd*," and Tooman "Covenant and Presence." See also Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 97–115, Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 68–79.

<sup>91</sup> This section should not be misunderstood as a claim or suggestion of literary dependence between the temple sermon and this portion of the book of Ezekiel. The nature of intertextuality is such that two texts may be understood as mutually illuminating even if there is no evidence of a deliberate reference to one within the other.

<sup>92</sup> Each of these texts features a similar use of the interrogative particle in exclamatory force (Joüon-Muraoka § 161 *b*) in their rhetorical questions. In both contexts the response of YHWH to the abominations has this sense of incredulity to it: in Jeremiah he addresses the people directly (*do you seriously think you can get away with this?*); in Ezekiel he addresses the prophet (*do you see what they are doing?*). Block's comment (*Book of Ezekiel*, 287) that translating these as questions is "inane" is quite unnecessary – it is precisely the nature of rhetorical questions that they can have an exclamatory function rather than being literally interrogative in their force.

<sup>93</sup> While scholars often, perhaps for convenience's sake, cite Ezek. 8–11 as a whole when discussing the dynamics of divine presence and absence, they presumably have in mind a few key texts within this complex vision sequence. I suggest that the key elements that seem to envision some form of divine departure or abandonment in this section are (1) the passages that suggest some form of causal relationship between abominations (תועבות) and distance from YHWH's sanctuary (8:6), as well as YHWH forsaking the land (8:11–13; cf. 9:9), and (2) the indications of the movements of the כבוד and its cherubim throne/attendants that are interspersed throughout the larger narrative of the vision sequence (8:4; 9:3a; 10:4–5, 15–19; 11:22–23; cf. the return of the כבוד in 43:1–12).

appearances (3:22–24; 8:4; 43:3),<sup>94</sup> and the relationship between the כבוד, the human-like figure and YHWH himself remains ambiguous throughout the vision sequences.<sup>95</sup> The text frequently indicates the presence of the כבוד using abstract terminology not only in describing the figure (1:28) but also in indicating its location and proximity (והנה-שם, 3:23; 8:4), as well as its movements (e.g. 9:3 in relation to 10:4).<sup>96</sup> Further, the lack of an explicit subject in the majority of the speaking verbs throughout the visionary material, combined with ambiguity regarding the extent to which various manifestations should be identified with YHWH, make it unclear whether one should understand it to be YHWH Himself or some other agent who speaks to the prophet in most cases. While many scholars seek to describe with precision the location and the movements of YHWH's presence at each stage of the account, I am inclined to suggest that the mystery and ambiguity of the text corresponds to the "elusive" character of the subject-matter.

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<sup>94</sup> Although discussions of divine presence and absence in the book of Ezekiel frequently focus their attention upon the three main vision cycles/sequences of the book (chaps. 1–3; 8–11; 40–48), and especially on the movement of the כבוד in chaps. 8–11, it is worth reminding oneself that the concept of divine presence is envisaged in multiple and various ways throughout the book, and how precisely each element relates to another is not always clear. The visionary material attributes some form of divine presence and/or agency to the hand of YHWH (יד-יהוה), the spirit (רוח), and the כבוד, and these frequently appear in close proximity to one another (see, e.g., 1:3–2:1; 3:12–15, 22–24). The pattern that begins to emerge in chapters 1–11 suggests that the יד-יהוה denotes the presence of YHWH to the prophet himself, perhaps as that which inaugurates or facilitates the visionary experiences, and the רוח should be understood as an agent that somehow affects the transportation of the prophet in the context of the vision (though note the variation in 8:3), whereas the כבוד seems to be a part of the visions, an entity that the prophet bears witness to as a result of his visionary experience, and presumably would not be able to apprehend otherwise. Thus, broadly speaking, one might envision the hand of YHWH and the spirit as mediating divine presence to the prophet himself, and the כבוד of YHWH as that which mediates divine presence to the people of Israel as a whole (though, of course, Ezekiel is also a part of that collective group).

<sup>95</sup> In 1:28 the text seems to suggest that everything that has come before in 1:4–27 was the "appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH" although it is perhaps possible that vv. 26–27 simply reveal a figure, and then the *kabod* in v. 28b actually refers to the rainbow described in 28a. In 3:12 the description of the *kabod* rising from its place is most naturally understood as a reference back to the human form seated on the throne-like image in 1:26, which would confirm my initial assumptions about chapter 1. In 3:22–24 there is a hint that the *kabod* might be best equated with YHWH himself, as YHWH tells the prophet *he* will meet him and speak to him in the valley, and it is the *kabod* that is present with Ezekiel there.

<sup>96</sup> See the discussion of the scribal technique of *Wiederaufnahme* (resumptive repetition) in Tooman, "Ezekiel's Radical Challenge," 504. He suggests that this should be understood as a scribal gloss, intended to clarify for readers the presence of the *kabod* by reminding the audience where it had been in 9:3, in preparation for its next movement in 10:18.

My goal in relating these texts is not to argue that both texts envision precisely the same dynamic, but rather that both texts wrestle with the same kinds of questions and concerns about divine presence in relation to moral failure and impurity, all in the context of the threat of exile as divine judgment.<sup>97</sup> In Ezekiel's temple visions, as in Jeremiah's temple sermon, the offenses of the people pose a threat to the ideal situation of YHWH dwelling with people in the context of an established sacred space. I propose that in both texts, this dynamic is best understood not by reconstructing largely distinct underlying theological traditions that are opposed to each other, but by recognizing the theological continuity within the tradition as a whole and seeing that both texts envision an inherently positive notion of YHWH dwelling in the midst of the people of Israel via the mediation of the temple, as well as warning that this state of affairs is threatened by the persistent rebellion and idolatry in which the people are engaged.<sup>98</sup>

If it is plausible to regard Jer. 7:8–11 as directly related to (and in some sense explicating) v. 4, then the words of deception may be understood as expressions of the mistaken belief that the practice of abominations goes unseen by YHWH, and thus does not negatively affect the ability of the people to stand in the presence of YHWH in the temple. There is no need to reconstruct an earlier belief in the inviolability of the temple that is now critiqued or overturned by Jeremiah, nor is the syntactically awkward construction of v. 4 a great impediment to understanding what the deceptive words consist of, the trust in which is to be avoided. To put it simply, the self-deception referenced in vv. 4 and 8 consists of the notion that the people will be able to commit all manner of cultic abominations and forms of injustice, and yet enjoy divine presence and receive divine protection via the mediation of the temple ( *ובאתם ועמדתם* ; Jer. 7:10); the divine retort is to affirm the acute awareness of YHWH,

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<sup>97</sup> I have attempted to heed Moberly's caution against conflating the message of these texts (see *Prophecy and Discernment*, 57, n. 45), while exploring further the possibility that they might be read intertextually as two witnesses that belong to the same theological tradition and reflect the way that the catastrophe of exile raised significant questions within that tradition about the relationship between covenant failure, divine judgment, and divine presence and absence.

<sup>98</sup> Renz ("Use of the Zion Tradition"), Tooman ("Ezekiel's Radical Challenge") and Strong ("God Ezekiel Inherits") each offer useful discussions of the book's relation to the Zion tradition and its supposed doctrine of inviolability. There is some overlap between these arguments and my own resistance to a straightforward hypothesis of Jeremiah's overt challenge to Zion theology.

alongside an incredulous and foreboding accusation that will lead into a more explicit pronouncement of judgment in vv. 12–15.

### *Section 3: From Warning to Threat: The Oracle of Judgment (vv. 12–15)*

If the promise of the temple sermon may be understood to signal divine presence as one of the central concerns of the text, then this raises the question of whether the corresponding judgment oracle in vv. 12–15 might not only envision the threat of exile but also the prospect of divine absence. The references to the fate of Shiloh in these verses are directly related to the preceding discussion of ambiguity associated with the terminology of dwelling and place, as well as the conceptualities of temple and land. The former cultic site is referred to by the same flexible term, מקום, that is capable of denoting both a particular sanctuary and a larger geographical area in vv. 3–11.<sup>99</sup> That polyvalence is extended into the subsequent section, as the term appears initially to refer to the particular sanctuary at Shiloh, formerly associated with YHWH's name (v. 12), and yet subsequently it clearly refers to the land given to the people of Judah and their ancestors (v. 14).<sup>100</sup>

#### *What Did YHWH Do to Shiloh?*

The concluding verses of the temple sermon function both to draw together various motifs from the preceding material and to introduce a new dynamic, namely the invocation of the fate of Shiloh as a precedent for the announcement of imminent judgment upon Judah.<sup>101</sup> Verse 12 introduces the allusion to Shiloh with two imperatives, inviting the audience to go (לכונא) to YHWH's sanctuary (מקומי) there and

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<sup>99</sup> See BDB, 879, HALOT, 2:626–627, on מקום; cf. Leuchter, “Temple Sermon.”

<sup>100</sup> In v. 12, the antecedent of the pronoun in the clause אשר-עשיתי לו must be מקומי אשר בשילו, and the invocation of a version of the Deuteronomistic formula ([ה]מקום אשר שכנתי שמי) in order to qualify that place as the one in which he had formerly caused his name to dwell (שכן), strongly indicates that the *sanctuary* at Shiloh, in particular, is in view in v. 12; however, the adjectival clause modifying מקום in v. 14, functions (much like its parallel appositional phrase in v. 7) to explicitly identify the ‘place’ here as the land of Judah.

<sup>101</sup> Levine (“Prophetic Attitudes,” 220–221) notes that the reference to Shiloh in this context is linked by diction to the oracle of Ahijah in 1 Ki. 14:9.

see (וּרְאוּ) what he did to it because of the evil/wickedness (רָאָה) of his people.<sup>102</sup> It is, of course, possible to understand these imperatives as a straightforward instruction from an author or tradent to his original audience, inviting them to literally travel to the ancient site and observe the ruins that are presumably nearby. In my view, however, it is preferable to understand this as a rhetorical invitation to consider or reflect upon the fate of Shiloh, with the purpose of provoking a re-evaluation of one's present situation and the possibilities of continuing in a similar pattern of wickedness (vv. 8–11) or changing one's ways and behavior (vv. 3, 5–7).<sup>103</sup>

The abrupt transition signaled in v. 13 (וַעֲתָה) is often understood as among the clearest signals of an absolute, or unconditional, word of judgment that is in stark contrast to the conditional dynamic operative earlier in the text.<sup>104</sup> Yet, even the material in vv. 13–15 may be understood as a rhetorical proclamation, intended to confront the audience with a choice rather than merely proclaiming inevitable judgment. The abominations listed in vv. 9–10 are summed up as כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים, and added to them is the indictment of failing – or perhaps better, refusing – to listen to YHWH's persistent previous attempts to get through to them (v. 13).<sup>105</sup> Then YHWH announces that he will do (וַעֲשִׂיתִי) to the Jerusalem temple what he did (עָשִׂיתִי) to Shiloh, and

<sup>102</sup> As noted above, the phrase אֲשֶׁר שָׁכַנְתִּי שָׁמָּה בְּרִאשׁוֹנָה may be understood as a variation on the *dtr.* formula that appears in vv. 10–11 and 14, and it makes an explicit connection between the affirmation of divine presence in the Jerusalem temple and his former presence at that cultic site. Allen (*Jeremiah*, 97) suggests that it may be understood as “a ‘deuteronomizing’ adaptation” of the similar description of the Shiloh sanctuary as the tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן) / tent (אֹהֶל) in which YHWH dwelt among humanity (שָׁכַן בְּאָדָם) in Ps. 78:60.

<sup>103</sup> In my view, the rhetorical purpose of citing the Shiloh precedent is not to focus attention on the fate of that cultic site *per se*, but rather to use the collective memory of its fate in order to provoke an appropriate response on the part of the current audience.

<sup>104</sup> The syntactical relationship between the purpose clause of v. 13a and the two-part announcement of judgment in vv. 14–15 might suggest evidence of compositional development. If the clause concerning the land-gift to the ancestors (14b) and v. 15 were to be deleted, then the remainder of this section would be perfectly explicable as a threat against the temple via the precedent of the Shiloh sanctuary. However, numerous speculative proposals such as this might reasonably be made, and in my view it is preferable to recognize that the present form of the text presents as inseparable the focus on both land and temple.

<sup>105</sup> The combination of the idiom, הִשְׁכַּח וְדָבַר, with the motif of YHWH calling and the people failing to answer evokes the motif of YHWH's servants the prophets, repeated in Jer. 7:25, 26:5 and elsewhere in the book. In contrast to Holladay's rejection of the idiom (on the basis of its absence in OG) as “secondary,” and as a “contaminated” blend of Jeremianic phrases from 35:17 and 35:14 (*Jeremiah*, 1:236, cf. Janzen, *Studies*, 37), it may be affirmed as the component in the text that most clearly signals YHWH's intention to get through to his people through the prophetic tradition, rather than merely to proclaim his wrath and inevitable judgment.



specifies that this will involve casting the people out of his sight (והשלכתי אתכם מעל פני), just as he had previously done to the people of the northern kingdom (כל-זרע אפרים).<sup>106</sup> In the context of a prophetic message that has explicitly called on its recipients to repent, confronted them with an inventory of their offences, and now invokes the precedent of a previous act of divine judgment for comparable behavior, the culminating oracle of judgment may be understood as a climactic and rhetorically forceful aspect of the overarching conditional dynamic operative in the text. As will be seen more explicitly in Jer. 26:3, such a threat may be understood as designed not simply to inform its audience of an inevitable fate but rather to present this fate as a looming possibility, precisely in order to provoke repentance and forestall that chain of events.

As noted above, the ancient cultic site of Shiloh is referred to by the same flexible term (מקום) that is capable of denoting both a particular sanctuary and a larger geographical area in vv. 3–11. Thus, what might initially seem to be a straightforward comparison between the fate of the sanctuary at Shiloh and the Jerusalem temple in vv. 12–14a is extended in vv. 14b–15 to include the land as a whole and the people who inhabit it. These observations complicate the matter of determining precisely what is envisioned by the two ambiguous references to what YHWH did to Shiloh (vv. 12, 14) as well as the best way to understand what YHWH now proclaims he will do to the Jerusalem temple and to the land of Judah in the light of that precedent (v. 14). Should one envision something that happened to the ancient cultic site itself, or to the geographical location more broadly? Perhaps both? And how does this relate to the present oracle of judgment? My contention is that just as both the promise of divine presence and land possession were in view in vv. 3–11, the invocation of Shiloh in vv. 12–15 functions to introduce the corresponding threats of both divine absence from the temple and the exile of the people from the land.

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<sup>106</sup> This way of communicating divine judgment further reinforces the interrelationship between the motifs of land possession and divine presence, since YHWH's casting out (שלך) of his people is expressed in an idiom that evokes a sense of his face, sight, or presence (פני) no longer being in their midst. Allen (*Jeremiah*, 97) suggests literary dependence on the phrase וימאס...אפרים in Ps. 78:67, in the light of the aforementioned lexical correspondence with v. 60; however, it should be noted that Ephraim is not directly the object of this verb in that context.

Previous approaches to the significance of Shiloh in the temple sermon have tended to focus primarily upon the relationship between exegetical observations, archaeological evidence, and historical reconstructions in an effort to determine the meaning and significance of the allusions. In the early 1970's R.A. Pearce advocated a revised dating of Shiloh's destruction to the late eighth century B.C.E. based on a reevaluation of both archaeological evidence and previous exegetical arguments; shortly afterward John Day leveled a critique of Pearce and other advocates of this re-assessment, in an effort to defend the plausibility of the earlier consensus of a mid-eleventh century date.<sup>107</sup> Subsequently, D.G. Schley produced a monograph involving an extensive review of both biblical traditions related to the ancient northern shrine and archaeological evidence from the geographical site at *Tell Seilun*, in which he disputed Day's argument and sought to demonstrate anew the superiority of the arguments for an eighth century dating.<sup>108</sup> Methodologically, such approaches suggest that by accurately dating the destruction of Shiloh based upon the available evidence, the interpreter will be able to discern the meaning intended by the allusions to both the geographical location and the historical event.<sup>109</sup>

While such historically-oriented methods and interpretative aims must be regarded as legitimate in their own right, it can nevertheless be useful to draw attention to their limitations with reference to the understanding of particular biblical texts.<sup>110</sup> For one thing, it is worth emphasizing that the *destruction* of Shiloh so often assumed by commentators is not explicitly mentioned in this or any other biblical

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<sup>107</sup> See, respectively, Pearce, "Shiloh and Jer 7:12, 14 & 15," and Day, "The Destruction of the Shiloh Sanctuary." The archaeological dispute arises primarily from the re-assessment of Buhl and Holm-Nielsen, *Danish Excavations*, the results of which are understood by Pearce to call into question, if not indeed to overturn, the conclusions of H. Kjaer ("The Excavation of Shiloh 1929," 105).

<sup>108</sup> Schley, *Shiloh: A Biblical City*.

<sup>109</sup> See Pearce, "Shiloh and Jer 7," 108; Day, "The Destruction of the Shiloh Sanctuary," 94.

<sup>110</sup> On the one hand, the role of archaeological evidence and an informed awareness of the possible historical situation in which a biblical passage is set (or to which it refers) are, in principle, exegetically valuable. On the other hand, the failure of questions related to dating, archaeological evidence and historical reconstructions to arrive at compelling *interpretations* of biblical texts often gives rise to hermeneutical explorations of alternative ways of construing texts and constructing meaning.

text.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the emphasis on issues of dating and historical reconstruction has yielded very little consensus, and may therefore be fairly regarded as limited in its ability to shed further light on the function of the Shiloh material in the temple sermon. As a result, there may be more exegetical insight to be gained from attention to the intertextual relationships between various biblical traditions associated with Shiloh, somewhat apart from questions about historical reference.

There are notable exceptions to a predominantly historical focus on the significance of Shiloh for the temple sermon. For example, R.W.L. Moberly remarks on the “strong theological resonances between Jeremiah 7 and 1 Samuel 4,” suggesting that both texts critique the complacent posture of the people toward temple or ark, as well as a misplaced confidence in the notion that the divine presence associated with these material objects might guarantee safety from military threat.<sup>112</sup> Additionally, he points out that Jeremiah’s explicit warning of divine judgment, envisaged as YHWH’s response to corruption and complacency, has an implicit counterpart in the ark narrative.<sup>113</sup> Although my own interpretation has sought to emphasize the motif of divine presence and absence in the temple sermon more than that of the prophetic critique of complacency and announcement of exile, I reiterate that these may be understood as complementary dynamics within the text rather than interpretations in stark conflict with one another. Thus, the present section may be regarded as building upon Moberly’s remarks by exploring further the “theological resonances” he identifies between these texts.<sup>114</sup>

Given the dual emphasis on temple and land, and on divine presence and absence as well as complacency and exile in Jer. 7:3–11 demonstrated above, coupled with the lack of explicit mention of the destruction of Shiloh in vv. 12–15, it is perhaps

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<sup>111</sup> Although there have been voices periodically calling attention to this fact (e.g. Pearce, “Shiloh and Jer 7,” 106; Overholt, *Threat of Falsehood*, 19; Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 48–49), many scholars persist in taking the references to Shiloh in vv. 12 and 14 as allusions to the site’s destruction at some point prior to Jeremiah’s day (see, e.g., McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:163–164).

<sup>112</sup> Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 62, n. 54. Cf. idem, “Sacramentality.”

<sup>113</sup> Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 62, n. 54.

<sup>114</sup> Indeed, Moberly’s interpretation does express some interest in the dynamics of divine presence – especially toward the end of this section – and I want to affirm his point about what is factually true or theologically legitimate being rendered ‘false’ because of corruption and complacency (see pp. 61–62).

unsurprising that in 1 Sam. 4 we find not only the complacency/exile dynamic in context of military threat but also persistent attention to the significance of divine presence and absence. Moreover, if we are searching for something YHWH actually *does* (עשה) in this text, I suggest that we might focus on the departure of the glory of YHWH articulated in 1 Sam. 4:21–22 rather than solely on the inference of the site’s destruction and the presumption that it is knowledge of this event that the temple sermon means to call attention to.<sup>115</sup>

### *1 Samuel 4:21–22 in the Context of the Ark Narrative*

1 Sam. 4 functions simultaneously as a conclusion to the preceding narrative concerning Samuel’s early life and the priestly line of Eli (chaps. 1–4), and as the beginning of the so-called ark narrative that follows in chapters 4–6.<sup>116</sup> The chapter relates a series of Israelite military engagements with the Philistines, culminating in the defeat of the Israelite forces, the death of Eli and his sons, and the loss of the ark of YHWH.<sup>117</sup> Following an initial defeat at the hands of the Philistines (4:1–2), the people of Israel seek to bolster their military effort by having the ark brought from Shiloh to the battlefield; yet despite both the exuberant confidence of the Israelites (v. 5) and the fear of the Philistines (vv. 6–8) upon the apparent arrival of YHWH’s presence in Israel’s camp, the anticlimactic result of the battle is another Philistine victory (v. 10). The aftermath of this second defeat involves the death of Eli (4:12–18), as well as the birth of his grandson and a poignant theological comment on the disastrous events with the final dying breath of his daughter-in-law (4:19–22); the unnamed daughter-in-law of Eli/wife of Phinehas gives birth and then dies in quick succession, using her

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<sup>115</sup> As Campbell points out (*The Ark Narrative*, 215), the reference to Shiloh in Ps. 78:59–64 reflects what is “precisely the picture of 1 Sam 4, where there is no mention of the destruction of Shiloh; it simply narrates the ark’s leaving Shiloh, never to return. It makes quite clear that Yahweh has left, forsaken, abandoned Shiloh; it does not say that he or the Philistines destroyed it.”

<sup>116</sup> On the question of the ark narrative as a discrete section and its relationship to its context, see Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 27–36. Cf. Frolov, *Turn of the Cycle*, 117–118, and Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 101–102.

<sup>117</sup> Thus, the prophecy in 1 Sam. 3:11–12 regarding what YHWH will do (עשה) in Israel and carry out (קום) against the house of Eli comes to pass in v. 11 with the death of Eli’s sons and the capture of the ark. On the importance of connecting the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas to earlier material in chaps. 2–3 see Frolov, *Turn of the Cycle*, 126.; Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 30–31.

final breaths to give her child the name Ichabod – or “*Where is the Glory?*” – and then twice proclaiming “The glory [*kabod*] has gone into exile from Israel” (4:19–22).<sup>118</sup>

In vv. 21–22 the naming of Eli’s grandson is explained by a two-fold causative association between the capture (לקח) of the ark and the exile (גלה) of glory from Israel.<sup>119</sup> However, the text is not entirely clear with regard to the distinction between the narrator’s discourse and the character’s speech. After the women attending to her (הנצבות עליה) have told the mother that she has borne a son, there is a narrative account of the name the boy was given and two successive introductions to the dying mother’s lament.<sup>120</sup> Yet, the extent of her speech in both verses is uncertain; it is possible to attribute the bulk of both verses to her own perspective, so that she twice connects the exile of glory in some causal way to the taking of the ark, and it is equally possible to understand the widow’s voice as limited to the two parallel indicative statements, גלה כבוד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, and to regard the further explanatory clauses as narrative explanations. Moreover, various combinations of these possibilities are possible.<sup>121</sup>

This ambiguity is compounded by the slight variation between the causative relationship between clauses in each verse. Although v. 22 features a relatively

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<sup>118</sup> The older view that the name אִי־כָבוֹד involves the negation of an adjective, on the basis of Ethiopic and Phoenician parallels, has more recently given way to comparisons with an Ugaritic expression of interrogative lament along the lines of: “where is x?; alas for x!” According to P. Kyle McCarter, “It belongs to a distinctive group of names referring to lamentation for an absent deity” (McCarter, *I Samuel*, 115–116.). Burnett (*Where is God?* 35–36) provides further support for this latter interpretation on the basis of a detailed analysis of various Semitic name types that feature similar interrogatives (cf. 27–42).

<sup>119</sup> Although it seems clear that v. 21 features the dying widow’s statement about the departure of the glory followed by the narrator’s comments about the capture of the ark and the death of her husband and father-in-law, it may not be possible to determine with certainty whether v. 22 should be taken as a similar mix of character’s and narrator’s voices or as a full quotation from the woman regarding both dynamics.

<sup>120</sup> The OG version differs significantly from the MT, as v. 21 remains in 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrative, describing a threefold rationale for the name of the child (ὕπὲρ τῆς κιβωτοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ πενθεροῦ αὐτῆς καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς), while v. 22 reports the direct speech of (presumably) the dying widow’s attendants concerning the theological implications of what has taken place.

<sup>121</sup> For example, Tsumura (*First Book of Samuel*, 200) puts the exile clause in the mouth of the widow, followed by a ‘with reference to...’ clause attributed to the narrator in v. 21, but then places both clauses in the speech of the woman in v. 22. Klein (*1 Samuel*, 37–38) prefers the LXX against MT here, thus omitting any indication of direct speech in v. 21 so that the initial verse is simply a narrative account of the naming and the reason, whereas the final verse is a full quotation of the woman with a simple narrative introduction.

straightforward causative relationship between the indicative clause about the exile of glory and the subsequent explanatory clause introduced by כִּי, there is less clarity regarding the causal relationship in v. 21. Because in the former instance the clauses are connected by the preposition עַל, it is possible that a causal relationship is not indicated at all, but that the narrator simply cites the widow's claim about the ark, and then explains that her statement (not to mention the name of the child) is "concerning" or "with reference to" the taking of the ark and the deaths of Eli and Phinehas.<sup>122</sup> Yet, it is also possible that the particle preposition could be taken as indicating a causative relationship, and thus the parallelism between the two verses might suggest that both are full quotations attributed to her.<sup>123</sup> Although either interpretation seems plausible, the former seems preferable since it makes the passage seem less redundant – i.e. the narrator first cites the widow's statement about the departure of the כְּבוֹד and then explains that this was said "with reference to" the taking of the ark; then, in the second quotation, the widow herself makes the explicit causative connection.

Regardless of how one construes such features, the narrative unquestionably indicates some sort of causal relationship between the catastrophe of the ark having been taken in the battle of Ebenezer and the evocative language of glory or honor departing from Israel. Although it is possible to take כְּבוֹד as a reference to the departure of honor from Israel, and thus primarily as a comment upon the ignoble behavior of the priestly family of Eli, it is preferable not to avoid or downplay the suggestive associations between the terms כְּבוֹד and גְּלוּה in the context of a narrative so focused on the dynamics of divine presence.<sup>124</sup> To be more specific, the possibility that כְּבוֹד indicates a manifestation of divine presence associated with the ark, and that the verb גָּלוּה indicates some form of divine abandonment associated with the capture of the ark, deserves careful consideration given the overarching concerns of the narrative.<sup>125</sup> Even

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<sup>122</sup> This is the interpretation of both McCarter (*I Samuel*, 113) and Klein (*1 Samuel*, 38-39), and it finds support in the LXX reading.

<sup>123</sup> Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 200; Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel*, 45, 50. cf. NAS, RSV.

<sup>124</sup> See Frolov, *Turn of the Cycle*, 127-128 for further discussion of these alternative possibilities. On the prominence of divine abandonment as a literary motif and form of theodicy in ANE literature see Block, "Divine Abandonment." On the potential influence of such literature upon the ark narrative, see Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*.

<sup>125</sup> So, Klein (*1 Samuel*, 45): "The glory, that is, the sign of God's presence (Ezek 10:18; Hos 10:5) has disappeared. The loss of the ark is the most serious of the problems listed (cf. its climactic position in v 17) and it is the ark's loss and the implied defeat of Yahweh symbolized thereby

if it is granted that the notion of divine presence going into exile may be attributed to the character of Eli's widow, the question remains whether such a perspective is endorsed by the narrative itself, or else perhaps intentionally portrayed as an illegitimate or faulty view that the larger narrative is designed to critique/discredit.

For example, D.T. Tsumura emphasizes the connection between the ark and the divine presence, and reads the particle כִּי in v. 22 as a causative "for." However, he thinks that the woman is mistaken in her understanding of what has happened.<sup>126</sup> Tsumura suggests that because God is about to demonstrate his glory in the following chapters (5–6) his glory has not truly departed as the woman supposes. Yet this is a rather wooden and unnecessary interpretation, neglecting the logic of the narrative as well as the sense in which YHWH's power over the Philistine deity Dagan and the manifestation of his presence do suggest that the presence of YHWH has in some sense departed from the midst of Israel.<sup>127</sup> A more significant challenge to my reading is found in Benjamin Sommer's interpretation of the ark narrative, to which I now turn.

#### *Sommer's Objection and My Response*

In his book *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, Benjamin Sommer argues that although Phinehas's widow *intends* to refer to the exile of YHWH's presence, the narrative subverts her words so that they should be understood to refer instead to the loss of Israel's honor.<sup>128</sup> According to Sommer, the ark narrative "presents a debate

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that will occupy the attention of ark narrative in the following chapters." He also suggests, "The name Ichabod poignantly expresses the problem of the absent god," and explains that, "The apparent defeat and the real absence of Yahweh provide opportunity in the next chapter for telling how Yahweh manifested his superiority over his Philistine captors" (45–46).

<sup>126</sup> Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 201.

<sup>127</sup> Even if it is preferable from a theological perspective to argue that divine absence in an 'absolute' sense is not envisioned by this text, there remains value in following the logic of the narrative, whereby the taking of the ark and the interpretation of Phinehas's widow are directly related to the subsequent apparent manifestations of divine presence throughout the various regions outside the Israelite camp.

<sup>128</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 102–105. For evidence that the term כָּבוֹד can be used often in the Hebrew Bible to refer in a mundane sense to the notion of honor, weightiness, and even simply the weight of a person, one need go no further than the immediate context of the current chapter and 1 Sam. 1–6 as a whole (see, e.g., 1 Sam. 2:29, 30 [x2] for verbal forms related to the action of honoring a person or honoring YHWH; 4:18 for and adjectival use with reference to Eli's weight; 5:6, 11 for verbal forms denoting the hand of YHWH being heavy upon someone/something; and 6:6 [x2] for verbal forms in the *piel* with reference to the hardening of hearts); on the other hand, the use of the term to denote the manifestation of the presence of

between two ways of understanding divine presence,” in which the *kabod* theology is rejected as an illegitimate view embraced by a “hated enemy” (i.e. the Philistines), and “a corrupt and discredited priestly house” (i.e. the house of Eli).<sup>129</sup> Arguing that the theological perspective associated with elders of Israel (4:3), the Philistine army (4:7–8) and the dying mother of Ichabod is rejected by the dominant ideology endorsed by the Deuteronomistic historians, he therefore concludes: “Regardless of her intentions, we ought to understand the verse to refer to Israel losing its honor, not to God going physically into exile.”<sup>130</sup>

However, Sommer’s reading may be resisted for the following reasons: First, the author’s inclusion of both Eli and his daughter-in-law in what he calls a “cutting indictment of the family” should be challenged given that the portrayal of these two characters – not least in their deaths – is more complicated and nuanced than the overtly negative portrayal of the rebellious sons of Eli, or the adversarial Philistines.<sup>131</sup> Although the portrayal of Eli’s sons certainly may be understood as entirely negative (see 1 Sam. 2:11–17, 22–25; 3:11–14), and the divine judgment against the priestly house of Eli as a whole is an important motif in the context (2:27–36), it remains the case that the textual portrayal of Eli himself is more complicated than Sommer allows. While Eli

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YHWH is both well-known and difficult to dissociate from the subject matter of the narrative (cf. *HALOT*, 2:455–458; *BDB*, 457–459). Likewise, the verb גלה might be interpreted in the more active sense of departure, or in the more passive sense of going into exile (cf. *HALOT*, 1:191; *BDB*, 163). Yet, not only does the verb itself suggest a personification of the subject that would be strange were the nation’s honor to be construed as the subject, but also the dual proclamation of the dying widow may be understood as a kind of parallel to the phrase נלקח ארון האלהים (“the ark of God was taken”), which recurs in varied forms five times throughout the chapter. Thus what the narrative emphasizes repeatedly in more mundane terms (the capture of the physical object) is interpreted theologically by this character as an indication of YHWH himself going into exile.

<sup>129</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 102–105, citation on 102. Sommer’s argument is especially relevant here as he briefly comments on the temple sermon as well, conceiving of it as closely analogous to the ark narrative in its rejection of the priestly *kabod* theology and its related critique of complacency.

<sup>130</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 105. In other words, because Phinehas’ widow is a member of this house, Sommer suggests that her theological commentary should not be taken at face value, but rather understood as part of the theological perspective that the narrative seeks to undermine and discredit. In my view, Sommer is not entirely clear in this section, sometimes wanting to distinguish between the priestly *kabod* theology and the Zion-Sabaoth ideology (as he does elsewhere) and sometimes conflating them.

<sup>131</sup> See Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 105. In fact, it might be suggested that even the Philistines are portrayed in a more sympathetic way than Sommer’s reading allows. See 1 Sam. 4:7–9, esp. v. 9.



by no means lives up to what is expected of him in the leadership of his family and the oversight of its priestly office, he is portrayed in both positive and negative light, a point which is perhaps highlighted even by the peculiar circumstances of his death (4:18), which form a striking contrast with the divine agency directly attributed to the death of Hophni and Phinehas (2:25, 34).<sup>132</sup> Likewise, the circumstances of his daughter-in-law's death are, arguably, more closely associated with the genre of tragedy than with a polemical indication of divine judgment, and there is scarcely a hint of any "guilt by association," not least as it is she who perceives the theological significance of what has occurred most clearly. These observations call into question the plausibility of Sommer's construal, according to which the narrator groups all of these characters together and attempts to discredit their theological perspective in an effort to promote his own theological view of divine presence.<sup>133</sup>

Second, Sommer himself cannot avoid remarking on the "lingering sense of the ark's awesome power" that is on display in the narrative context of chapters 4–6.<sup>134</sup> In an attempt to do justice to this dynamic, Sommer appeals to the literary history of the text, suggesting that the tension in the final form may result in the retained presence of both an "original text" associated with the priestly *kabod* theology and "a later reworking by Deuteronomistic editors who opposed that theology."<sup>135</sup> However, it is not clear that such an account provides an adequate explanation.<sup>136</sup> Within the wider

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<sup>132</sup> What I mean by this is that the portrayal of Eli's death seems to communicate a kind of ambivalence with regard to divine agency, in contrast to the common pattern of death accounts which seem more intent on envisioning direct divine agency and thereby explicit divine judgment. It seems to me that the account of his death fits with an overall portrayal of Eli that highlights both positive (attempts to keep sons in line; teaching the young Samuel about the voice of YHWH) and negative (failure of perception, failure to keep sons in line) elements.

<sup>133</sup> Note the full quotation from Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 102, where these characters together represent "the theology of a hated enemy and of a corrupt and discredited priestly house."

<sup>134</sup> To be specific, the continuation of the ark narrative in 1 Sam. 5–6, along with related passages in 1 Sam. 14:18ff. and 2 Sam. 6, together provide ample indication of a powerful divine presence and its manifestations in connection with the ark. Such an association is indicated throughout the episodes concerning the ark in 1 Samuel, and it is suggested by the use of the verb גלה to describe the verbal action. While it certainly remains possible that this character (or this narrative) only intends to refer to honor or glory, in the adjectival sense, having departed from Israel, I would suggest that use of the term to denote a manifestation of the divine presence in the HB suggests itself here not only because of the direct association with the ark of God but also given the contextual significance of dynamics of divine presence and absence.

<sup>135</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 107. Cf. p. 102.

<sup>136</sup> In this context, Sommer's argument depends upon earlier contrasts he has developed between a deuteronomic *shem* theology and a priestly *kabod* theology, as well as between these

argument of the monograph, the author has committed to a particular reconstruction of the so-called deuteronomic perspective on divine presence, according to which “the ark houses only the verbal record of God’s covenant and not God’s physical presence.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, it is unsurprising that any apparent evidence of what has been determined to be a different or opposing theology of divine presence should be attributed to another source, so that the “lingering sense of the ark’s awesome power in the final form” is explained as an “ambivalence...in Dtr’s portrayal of the ark.”<sup>138</sup> However, a simpler and more plausible solution to this apparent complexity may be offered instead, namely that this narrative simply may not fit the precise ideological features supposed by Sommer’s typology.<sup>139</sup>

A different perspective on the significance of the ark is presented in Gary A. Anderson’s essay, “To See Where God Dwells.”<sup>140</sup> Anderson argues that both literary and iconographic sources of the Second Temple period reveal an “exalted estimation” of the furniture of the Temple as “quasi-divine,” making them “dangerous to look at but at the same time, quite paradoxically, desirous or even compulsory to contemplate.”<sup>141</sup> Anderson begins with a discussion of the ark of the covenant, noting that it is consistently and closely identified with the presence of YHWH in texts such as Num. 10:35–36 and Ps. 24:7–10. He then goes on to suggest that “The close nexus between God and this piece of cultic furniture is nicely illustrated” by the account of the defeat of Israel and the capture of the ark in 1 Sam. 4.<sup>142</sup> Although Anderson recognizes with Sommer and others the “rash and ill-considered efforts of the Israelites to misuse this divine image” that is portrayed in this account, he nevertheless resists

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two ideological schools and yet other biblical traditions that embrace more fluid conceptions of divine selfhood and embodiment, thus using the terms שם and כבוד in markedly different ways.

<sup>137</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 107.

<sup>138</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 107.

<sup>139</sup> Although as a rule this monograph features an admirable attempt to offer careful interpretations of particular texts and nuanced accounts of the perspectives evident therein, Sommer at times falls into the kind of problematic reasoning in which a set of texts is taken to establish a particular perspective (e.g. Dtr name-theology), which then functions to dictate what another text or term must mean based on its putative association with this perspective.

<sup>140</sup> Anderson, “To See Where God Dwells.”

<sup>141</sup> Anderson also advances the claim that these dynamics had a formative influence both in the Christian adoption of the “Jewish theologoumenon as a means of clarifying how it was that Jesus could be both God and man,” and upon the development of Christian mysticism. However, these elements of his argument are not the focus of the present study.

<sup>142</sup> Anderson, “To See Where God Dwells,” 16. Cf. Moberly “Sacramentality.”

allowing such a critique to overshadow the positive theology of divine presence that is retained within the passage. After citing 1 Sam. 4:5–8 Anderson comments:

The highly realistic tenor of the language here must not be overlooked. Though God is not fully reducible to or coterminous with the Ark, his presence is nevertheless so closely interwoven with it that one can point to the Ark as it approaches in military processions and say, 'here comes God.'<sup>143</sup>

In my view, this reading is preferable to that offered by Sommer, as it affirms an important element of nuance whereby a critique of misplaced confidence in the ark is not equated with a critique of the very notion that the ark might mediate divine presence in a powerful and mysterious way.<sup>144</sup>

If one does not force the attribution of specific ideological perspectives to each set of characters in the story, then it remains possible that the ark narrative might involve a critique of Israel's complacency and the mistaken views of the Philistines with regard to the nature of divine presence, while nonetheless communicating an authentic lament (via Phinehas's wife) at the departure of YHWH's presence from the midst of the community and the disastrous implications of such an event. Thus, while Sommer's interpretation of these verses is certainly plausible, it is by no means decisive. If it is reasonable instead to take the dying words of Phinehas's widow more-or-less at face value, then perhaps the obscure references in Jeremiah's temple sermon to what YHWH did to Shiloh may be understood as an evocative allusion to the departure of the divine presence from the sanctuary as a result of moral impurity rather than merely to the destruction of the sanctuary that may be inferred from the narrative description of the military defeat in 1 Sam. 4.

To conclude this section, my contention is that the ambiguity in Jeremiah's temple sermon with respect to what YHWH *did* to Shiloh (vv. 12, 14) may be understood with reference not merely to a presumed historical memory of the northern sanctuary's destruction, but rather to the departure of the presence of YHWH from the

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<sup>143</sup> Anderson, "To See Where God Dwells," 16.

<sup>144</sup> Later on in the essay ("To See Where God Dwells," 25-26) Anderson briefly discusses 1 Sam. 6:19 as well. Although he acknowledges that this text "appears secondary and probably reflects a late scribal attempt to bring the traditions of Numbers 4 into alignment with the care needed when taking the Ark into a public domain," he nevertheless maintains that "the lesson is clear: the Ark is not just a symbol for God; in some very real sense it is so closely linked to God that gazing indiscreetly upon it is an occasion for instant death."

midst of his people.<sup>145</sup> Just as the promise of both divine presence and land possession were in view in vv. 3–11, the invocation of Shiloh in vv. 12–15 functions to introduce the corresponding threats of both divine absence from the temple *and* the exile of the people from the land. This interpretation further reinforces my resistance to reading the temple sermon as a polemic against the doctrine of Zion’s inviolability, as 1 Sam. 4 and Jer. 7:1–15 may be understood to display comparable theological perspectives on divine presence and absence, despite their apparent affinities with the Zion tradition and Deuteronomistic theology, respectively. Moreover, in contrast to a hermeneutic emphasizing conflict between these traditions, both texts may be understood to highlight and critique the more general and pervasive problem of religious complacency, to which Jeremiah’s temple sermon offers the alternative of repentance and the continuation of YHWH’s presence in the midst of his people.

### *Conclusion: What the Temple Sermon “Might Mean”*

In my reading of the temple sermon I have challenged both exegetical judgments and hermeneutical paradigms that, in my view, have a tendency to restrict the interpretative possibilities inherent in the text according to assumptions about what the passage *must mean*. In contrast, I have offered a fresh account of what the temple sermon *might mean*, from the perspective of an explicitly theological hermeneutic. In conclusion, I will highlight three elements of this interpretation that contribute to the overarching argument(s) of this thesis, including a reframing of the nature of theological traditions discerned in the text, a continued resistance of the inviolability hypothesis, and an assertion of the conditional dynamic operative within the canonical form of the text.

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<sup>145</sup> This need not be construed as a claim about communicative intention or literary dependence; the text clearly makes an allusion to Shiloh, but my claim is *not* that there is a deliberate authorial reference to 1 Sam. 4:21–22, only that the allusion may be interpreted in such a way. The notion of intertextuality as a phenomenon brought about by the shared literary (and canonical) context of two related texts, and as an interpretative approach stemming from engagement with the texts in that context, may be exegetically illuminating apart from the question of intentionality with regard to a particular reference or allusion.

By asking instead what the temple sermon *might mean*, I am drawing upon the 1981 essay by Nicholas Lash, entitled ‘What Might Martyrdom Mean?’, in which the author stresses the dialectic interrelationship between past and present in the construction of meaning, and argues that “the articulation of what the text might ‘mean’ today, is a necessary condition of hearing what the text ‘originally meant’.”<sup>146</sup> Building in part upon Lash’s argument, Walter Moberly has recently proposed that the Christian church may be understood to function as a plausibility structure in which preunderstandings and priorities are shared across time and space, so that the church’s theological interpretation of Scripture may be conceived of as performance, or representation, of the authoritative biblical witness within the context of the authoritative witness of the ecclesial community.<sup>147</sup> In applying these insights to the present argument, I suggest that contemporary theological reflection upon the dynamics of divine presence and absence might play a constructive role in our understanding of both the temple sermon and the ark narrative, precisely because it is part of a tradition that demonstrates a capacity to embrace categories such as paradox and enigma in interpretative cases involving textual ambiguity and conceptual tensions.<sup>148</sup>

The hypothesis that the compositional development of the book of Jeremiah has been heavily influenced by a Deuteronomistic perspective, not least in its prose sections, leads easily to the assumption that the book’s perspective on the temple and theology of divine presence must share little or nothing in common with the so-called “priestly” perspective found in the P material in the Pentateuch or in the book of Ezekiel. Thus, in a recent article, Mark Leuchter scoffs at the hypothetical notion that priestly interests or dynamics might be discerned within the temple sermon of Jeremiah, given the “overwhelming stylistic bias in the paraenetic oracles” that is

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<sup>146</sup> Lash, “Martyrdom,”

<sup>147</sup> Moberly, “Presuppositions.” Cf. Moberly, “Theological Approaches.”

<sup>148</sup> In other words, the theological dynamics evident in contemporary theological traditions that involve an enigmatic and even paradoxical discourse regarding divine presence and absence may be regarded as a useful conversation partner for a text that seems to portray such dynamics in similarly enigmatic and ambiguous ways. On the presence and function of paradox in theological discourse, see Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology*. See also Moberly’s discussion of divine repentance in *Old Testament Theology*, 107–143, esp. pp. 114, 119.

indicative of Deuteronomistic influence.<sup>149</sup> Although Leuchter finds in Jeremiah 7:1–15 a “unique discourse on the nature of the temple as a sacred space that Deuteronomy and the DH do not possess,” he remarks confidently: “...obviously, no critical reader can look to an oracle such as the Temple Sermon (Jer 7,1–15) and identify it as the work of a P tradent.”<sup>150</sup> While it has not been my intention to argue for the hypothesis of priestly authorship or redaction here dismissed by Leuchter, I do wish to challenge his assumption that the style and content of the prose material in Jeremiah is so obviously Deuteronomistic that one could not reasonably expect to find priestly concerns expressed therein.<sup>151</sup>

Similarly, in his monograph *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, Benjamin Sommer regards the Deuteronomistic character of Jeremiah’s perspective on divine presence to be so obvious and thoroughgoing that his account of the prophet’s posture toward the temple leaves something to be desired. Building upon influential studies by von Rad and Mettinger, Sommer distinguishes between theologies of divine presence referred to as the Deuteronomistic *shem* theology and the priestly *kabod* theology, both of which are thought to develop in response to the more ancient Zion-Sabaoth tradition, with its relatively crude and naïve dogma of Zion’s inviolability.<sup>152</sup> Given the stark contrast Sommer perceives between those biblical traditions that communicate the notion of divine presence in relation to the divine name (שם) and those that emphasize the motif of God’s glory (כבוד) it is perhaps unsurprising that in

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<sup>149</sup> Leuchter, “Medium and Message, 212.

<sup>150</sup> Leuchter, “Medium and Message, 212. Clearly, Leuchter is either unaware of, or else implicitly dismissive of, Jonathan Klawans’ treatment of this text in his *Purity, Sacrifice and Temple*, 89-93, since Klawans does go so far as to argue that there may be more evidence of priestly concerns rather than a strictly dtr perspective in this text. Although my argument neither depends on that of Klawans, nor agrees with each of his points, his treatment is (arguably) compelling enough to warrant engagement rather than this sort of dismissive comment, not least because Leuchter goes on to admit that various elements of the temple sermon don’t seem to fit the Dtr style and concerns in the ways that one might expect.

<sup>151</sup> Recent voices have suggested a re-evaluation of the relationship between Jeremiah and Deuteronomistic theology (see Silver, “Prophet and Lying Pen”), and Dalit Rom-Shiloni has recently produced a number of studies exploring elements of linguistic and theological relationships between the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. See Rom-Shiloni, “Ezekiel and Jeremiah,” “Destruction and Exile,” and “Deuteronomic Concepts.”

<sup>152</sup> See Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 58-79. As noted above, his account of the relationship between 1 Sam. 4 and Jer. 7:1–15 is dependent upon this reconstruction of elements of conflict and development among ancient Israelite theologies of divine presence.

his discussion of Jeremiah 7 he can claim that “Jeremiah, the most deuteronomic of prophets, lacks any vision of God,” and that “Jeremiah, like Deuteronomy, does not believe in sacred space.”<sup>153</sup>

However, in the light of the reading presented above, it is not at all clear that these theological perspectives need be understood as fundamentally distinct from or in opposition to one another. While there are clear differences in emphasis, and perhaps even elements of tension between these texts and the traditions that they represent, there is also considerable coherence and continuity among them, and this observation gains additional plausibility from the fact that they all contribute to theological traditions that may be understood – from a contemporary perspective – to have a profound and meaningful sense of continuity (as well as considerable elements of diversity) in their understandings of divine presence and absence, or non-presence.<sup>154</sup>

In what serves as the opening essay in a recent volume populated primarily by biblical scholars, theologian Trevor Hart argues that the conceptualities of God’s presence and absence have always been bound up with each other in complicated ways.<sup>155</sup> Drawing upon the work of Samuel Terrien and Ingolf Dalferth, he claims that in ancient Israelite religion, as well as in both Jewish and Christian tradition, divine

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<sup>153</sup> The full quotation from which these remarks are drawn is found in an endnote to a passage in which Sommer suggests that the perspective evident in the book of Deuteronomy and Dtr theology calls to mind Paul Tillich’s comment that Protestant Christianity is ‘a religion of the ear and not of the eye’ – an indication of the privileging of the revelatory Word over the aesthetic dimension – to which the theology of P and J and most prophets is a striking contrast. In the endnote Sommer explains, “Thus it is significant that for all the many similarities among the prophetic call narratives in Exodus 3-4, Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, and Ezekiel 1-3, the call of Jeremiah stands out: *For Jeremiah, the most deuteronomic of prophets, lacks any vision of God.* Jeremiah hears and (in verse 9) feels God, but unlike Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, he does not see God. In light of this distinction, it is not surprising that Jeremiah’s (iconoclastic, Protestant) attack in Jeremiah 7 and 26 on those who love the temple building too much can be read as an implicit attack on Isaiah and Psalms, which uphold the doctrine of Zion’s inviolability. *Jeremiah, like Deuteronomy, does not believe in sacred space, whereas Isaiah and Psalms do*” (Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 256, n. 56 [my emphasis]).

<sup>154</sup> It is certainly *possible* that individuals or groups held to what one might now refer to as heretical or heterodox conceptions about divine presence and absolute guarantees of protection. The present argument does not involve establishing that there were no such mistaken beliefs; rather, it points out that (1) there is no explicit indication of a well-defined doctrine of inviolability, given that relevant texts may be read in more than one way, and that (2) the fact that the tradition demonstrates a capacity for nuance suggests the possibility that ancient people might have been able to demonstrate similar qualities as well.

<sup>155</sup> Hart, “Complicating Presence.”

presence has consistently been conceived of in dialectical and eschatological terms; never directly apprehended or guaranteed, but always in some kind of tension with divine absence or elusiveness.<sup>156</sup> Hart goes on to explore the way in which God may be understood in Christian theology as, on the one hand, ubiquitously and universally present and yet, on the other hand, specially present in various modes, concentrated in particular places and times. He claims that “God’s presence is not only of a single sort, but can be identified in various modes, and sometimes in more than one at the same time,”<sup>157</sup> and he fleshes out this claim within a Trinitarian rubric. Yet he asserts that the various ways in which God might be acknowledged as present in special and particular ways does not necessarily conflict with a conviction of his ubiquitous presence in and to his creation. Indeed, he contends that “in the pattern of scripture these two themes are typically woven together without any sense of incompatibility or embarrassment...”<sup>158</sup>

Hart’s argument indicates that theological discourse within the Christian tradition provides resources for conceiving of the nature of divine presence in ways that do not easily correspond to reconstructions of conflicting theological or ideological perspectives; rather, the tradition is capable of both embodying and facilitating a paradoxical discourse with reference to an enigmatic subject that cannot properly be reduced simply to its constituent parts. Such a hermeneutical perspective supports my resistance to paradigms that construct a strict dichotomy between the *shem* and *kabod* theologies of divine presence, dictating what a given text associated with one or the other must mean. In addition, it lends plausibility to my argument that Jeremiah’s temple sermon may be understood not as a text concerned *either* with exile and land possession *or* with the temple and divine presence, but as a more complex wrestling with the theological dynamics of divine presence and absence in the context of exile.

This is not to say that the diversity of perspectives in the Hebrew Bible’s portrayal of divine presence should be harmonized or flattened out into a monolithic

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<sup>156</sup> It is important to emphasize here that my reason for engaging with Hart is to elucidate the nature of contemporary theological reflection in this particular area, not to make any claim about the historical character of ancient Israelite religion or its theology/theologies of divine presence.

<sup>157</sup> Hart, “Complicating Presence,” 7.

<sup>158</sup> Hart, “Complicating Presence,” 20.



theology; rather it is to stress the importance of situating this diversity within a set of contexts – both the literary context of the canon and the theological context of the traditions for which it functions as scripture. To be sure, one will want to avoid conflating the message of the temple sermon with a text such as, for example, Ezekiel 8–11, with its distinctive perspective on divine presence and absence. Yet, there is a corresponding danger in imagining that these perspectives are so far removed from one another that their participation within a large-scale theological tradition recedes from view. While I don't doubt the presence of diverse perspectives and even tensions between them within the biblical text and its compositional development, I think that a theological reading of this situation is possible, and might offer a more nuanced hermeneutical framework for understanding the relationship between the texts. I have tried to read Jer. 7:1–15 in connection with Ezek. 8–11 and 1 Sam. 4 not in a way that denies difference, and yet in a way that highlights a coherence and signals a tradition to which all three belong.

In this chapter, I have argued that the account of the temple sermon in Jer. 7:1–15 is more directly concerned with the subject of divine presence and absence than is often recognized. This reading not only resists elements of the overarching reconstruction of ancient Israelite theologies of divine presence described above, but also functions as a positive alternative reading corresponding to my critique of the inviolability hypothesis in chapter two. Rather than providing a window into a supposed Deuteronomistic polemic against a view of divine presence as providing an absolute guarantee of divine protection over the city and temple, I have suggested that the temple sermon may be understood to confront its hearers and readers with a message of divine judgment, intended to encourage repentance so that the announced judgment will not be carried out. If this represents a plausible reading of the text as a whole, then I suggest that the particular sections that appear to give evidence of some misguided theological perspective underlying the text are more profitably understood as indications of the perennial and ubiquitous problem of complacency.

This reading has also highlighted the conditional dynamic as an inherent feature of the text as a whole, rather than being understood as the perspective of one group of tradents, juxtaposed with the absolute or unconditional view of another

group. If there are elements of tension and ambiguity within the text, the above interpretation demonstrates that they need not necessarily be explained by recourse to theories of compositional development and clashing ideologies, but rather may be understood as elements of ambiguity that reflect the elusive character of the subject matter and the truly contingent nature of the response that they provoke. If both prophet and audience, along with any authors, editors and tradents involved in the text's compositional history, are understood to participate within a theological tradition to which a covenantal relationship between YHWH and his people is central, then it is plausible that they would understand the nature of prophetic speech, as well as the possibilities regarding their own future, in the light of the inherent contingencies of such a relationship.

## 5. Hearing and Handling the Word of God: Jeremiah 26:1–24

In this chapter I present a theologically-oriented reading of the narrative in Jeremiah 26:1–24, which may be understood as the temple sermon revisited. In addition to the basic objective of offering a fresh interpretation of the episode in conversation with critical scholarship, I will discuss how this text contributes to the broader argument of the present thesis, including its literary and hermeneutical relationship to Jer. 7:1–15. I argue that the narrative account of the temple sermon and the ensuing conflict over its interpretation may be understood as a deconstructing trial narrative, a reading that has the effect of shifting the focus away from the fate of the prophet himself, the question of legal procedures in ancient Israel, and putative ideological conflicts behind the text, and toward the content of the prophetic message itself. Although the text gives some indication of portraying a formal trial scene, the ambiguity of the roles of participants, the disordered progression of events, and the stubborn irresolution of the narrative problematize such a reading. Moreover, the recapitulation of the central message of the temple sermon proper in vv. 3–6 and in Jeremiah's restrained self-defense (vv. 12–15) together may be understood to interpret Jer. 7:1–15, reiterating and recontextualizing the inherently conditional thrust of its message.

As with my interpretation of Jer. 7:1–15 in the previous chapter, I propose a reading of Jer. 26 that takes seriously both the canonical form of the biblical text (MT) and the evidence of its compositional history, while resisting interpretative paradigms that are preoccupied with problematic reconstructions of putative conflicting ideological and theological perspectives behind the text. Thus, this chapter functions both as an illustration and a case study in relation to the wider argument of the thesis, suggesting the inadequacy of the inviolability hypothesis as a hermeneutical paradigm for the interpretation of these texts and emphasizing the centrality of the inherently conditional prophetic message operative in both accounts of Jeremiah's temple sermon. Rather than providing a window into conflicting theological traditions behind the text, this narrative's nuanced portrayal of the conflict of interpretation over Jeremiah's message suggests that the word of YHWH can neither be prosecuted nor defended

according to the standards of detached logical argument, but is only properly understood in the context of an authentic resolve to hear and respond to it.

### *Setting the Scene*

The opening narrative of what is widely regarded as the second major section of the book of Jeremiah (chapters 26–45) portrays a conflict between the prophet and various authority figures in the Judahite community. Reiterating both language and motifs from the account of the temple sermon in 7:1–15, chapter 26 relates a narrative episode in which Jeremiah is sent by YHWH to the temple and commanded to deliver a prophetic warning to the people of Judah. The trial-like scene that develops involves both a direct challenge to Jeremiah's authority and legitimacy as a prophet, and also a conflict of interpretation over the nature and implications of his message. From the perspective of the narrative sequence of the canonical book of Jeremiah (MT), the authority and legitimacy of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry have been firmly established; yet, the commotion caused by Jeremiah's proclamation in chap. 26 reveals that his authority as a prophet functioning within the community can by no means be taken for granted within the context of the narrative world, and thus both his own fate and the possible responses of the community to his message remain contested and uncertain.<sup>1</sup> The scene may be understood as a complex portrayal of an attempt by various leaders (religious, political, social) within the Judahite community to *handle* both the prophet and his message, in a way that highlights their refusal to *hear* the word of YHWH and respond to it in the way that is envisioned and exhorted. In the commotion that follows Jeremiah's proclamation in the temple, the various characters involved – including not only leaders but also the general populace – appear to be convinced that they are in a position to determine the legitimacy of the prophetic word and the fate of its bearer; yet, what becomes clear is that what truly hangs in the balance is the fate of the community itself, as their continued life as the covenant people of God depends upon their ability to truly hear and respond in obedience to the words of this prophet which constitute the authoritative word of YHWH Himself.

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<sup>1</sup> See Reventlow, "Gattung und Überlieferung," as well as O'Connor's response ("Do Not Trim," 618).

Not only have interpreters frequently claimed to find in Jer. 26 a relatively coherent and straightforward trial scene, but some go so far as to describe it as “the most detailed description of a trial in the OT.”<sup>2</sup> Hans Jochen Boecker and Raymond Westbrook have each sought to understand the account within the context of ancient Near Eastern law and jurisprudence, and both conclude that it forms a coherent narrative whole and that the various expected components of a legal trial may be delineated therein.<sup>3</sup> Although Westbrook acknowledges the various elements of apparent irregularity in the proceedings, he offers the following explanation:

Because the trial turns upon the law, not the facts, the proceedings have nothing of the character of a conventional hearing in which the prosecution and defence present conflicting narratives and adduce evidence in support, and the judges decide on the true version of the events.<sup>4</sup>

Michael Fishbane regards the portrayal as “an accurate reflex of actual historical procedures and modes of legal rationality,” in which the “plaintiffs...apply the rule found in Deut. 18:20 to the case.”<sup>5</sup> O’Connor claims that “the narrator deftly constructs a formal court scene by the employment of three literary devices,” which she identifies as the use of the root קהל to designate a legal assembly, the authoritative presence of the

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<sup>2</sup> Boecker, *Law and Administration*, 44. Cf. idem, *Redeformen*, esp. 71-79 and 94-96. See Dubbink, “A Story of Three Prophets,” and Osuji, *Where is Truth?*, for defenses of the narrative’s coherence.

<sup>3</sup> Referring to the account as “a trial for blasphemy,” Boecker (*Law and Administration*, 44) identifies “a pre-trial accusation (v. 9), a speech by the prosecution (v. 11), a speech by the defence (vv. 12–15), a proposal to bring hostilities to an end (v. 13) and a formulation of the sentence (v. 16).” Westbrook (“Trial of Jeremiah”) suggests that the trial involves the question of false prophecy, with reference to Deut. 18:20–22, and he delineates a formal seizure and accusation (vv. 7–9), a legal argument presented by the prosecution (v. 11), an oration constituting Jeremiah’s self-defence (vv. 12–15), and an acquittal (v. 16). He interprets vv. 17–19 as a “postscript,” and vv. 20–24 as features of a narrative conclusion with no “forensic role” (105-106).

<sup>4</sup> Westbrook, “Trial of Jeremiah,” 101. Initially, Westbrook suggests that the account only fails to conform to expectations because modern readers are prone to bring to the text anachronistic assumptions based on contemporary models of jurisprudence, and that, “When seen in the context of ancient Near Eastern litigation, many of the discrepancies fall away” (95). However, he later comments that “The progress of the trial is sketched in the bold lines of a good courtroom drama,” implying that it may be understood as coherent in somewhat more general terms (104).

<sup>5</sup> See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 245-247, here 246. According to Fishbane, vv. 16–19 and 20–23 may be understood as a precedent and counter-precedent, respectively, and so constitute a prime example of inner-biblical exegesis and legal deliberation with reference to the *traditum* of Deut. 18:20.

שרים at the temple gate, and the structuring of the account “according to court procedure: accusation (v 11), defense (vv 12–15) and verdict (v 16).”<sup>6</sup>

Yet these conclusions can and should be called into question. For one thing, it is worth emphasizing that the distinctive legal terms so often employed by interpreters, from the roles of prosecution, jury, and judges to the procedural stages of accusation, defense and verdict are nowhere signaled by the text. Although this observation does not, on its own, preclude the possibility that characters might function in such ways, or that the procedure may be accurately described accordingly, it will become clear in what follows that both the roles of various characters and the progression of events resist such straightforward categorization.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in stark contrast to such readings, many interpreters regard the narrative of Jer. 26 to be convoluted enough so as to resist classification as a coherent narrative account, let alone a paradigmatic trial scene.<sup>8</sup> Robert Carroll finds evidence of “too many discrete strands...for a coherent account to be derived,” and claims that “so many discrete elements have ruined whatever may have been the original story.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in the light of both literary shifts and theological tensions that she describes as “irreducible,” Carolyn Sharp asserts, “Attempts to read the story as a relatively coherent unity in literary terms...cannot succeed, and even a position that allows for light redaction at the end of the chapter fails to account for all the difficulties.”<sup>10</sup>

Rather than deciding between these two frameworks, the following interpretation will seek to take seriously both the clear signals that something akin to a trial scene develops within the narrative and the persistent indications that the scene

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<sup>6</sup> O'Connor, “Do not Trim,” 621. Although O'Connor is among those who find there to be considerable “inconsistencies and contradictions” within the narrative as a whole, she understands these to be a feature of the likely editorial addition of vv. 17–24, in contrast to the “smooth literary unit of vv 1–16” (623). Cf. Hossfeld and Meyer, “Prophet vor dem Tribunal,” 33–42.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Carroll makes much of the inconsistent role of כליהעם in the story (*Chaos to Covenant*, 93ff.), and the false conclusion of v. 16 (*Jeremiah*, 517, 521), and notes more generally that “The switches and shifts in the narrative underline the discrete nature of much of the material but also frustrate the interpretative task of making sense of the whole” (521).

<sup>8</sup> See Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 54–61; Carroll, *Jeremiah*; Hossfeld and Meyer, “Prophet vor dem Tribunal.”

<sup>9</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 520, 521.

<sup>10</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 56.

refuses to conform to the expectations of that genre.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, I maintain that the various indications of a legal portrayal are set within a context that features consistent departures from expected judicial roles and procedures, thus precluding a reading of the text as a straightforward trial narrative. On the other hand, I affirm the presupposition that the text is understandable as a narrative account, despite the apparent complexity of its compositional history, and I seek to account for the relationship between the parts and the whole in a way that does justice to the tensions as well as the coherence evident within the canonical form. Therefore, I resist grounding the interpretation of this text either in its supposed coherence as a trial account or in the reconstruction of its putative editorial layers, instead seeking to highlight what I take to be the inherently conditional dynamic of the prophetic message and the emphasis on its reception within the community that appears to be the focus of the canonical portrayal.

### *Section 1: The Recapitulation of the Oracle in the Temple (vv. 1–6)*

There are indications that chapter 26 is intended to look both backward as well as forward within the context of the canonical form of the book (MT). On the one hand, the various features of lexical and thematic correspondence with chap. 7, especially in 26:1–6, suggest that this may be understood as a distinct, secondary account of the same event.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, it has not been uncommon for interpreters to suggest that the opening verses of chapter 26 pertain not only to the particular message that follows but also to Jeremiah's prophetic ministry as a whole, along with the tradition and book associated with it.<sup>13</sup> Numerous scholars makes the structural observation that

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview of trial procedures in the Hebrew Bible, see Holtz in *Encyclopedia of Bible & Law*, 414–420. Although both Boecker and Westbrook helpfully seek to inform such expectations with an awareness of legal norms from the ANE, it does not seem to me that either of their accounts provides a compelling explanation for the irregularities of chap. 26, not least given the circular reasoning whereby what is taken to be the paradigmatic account of a trial in the Hebrew Bible must have its irregularities explained by recourse to the claim that ancient trials differed from modern ones.

<sup>12</sup> See discussion in chapter one, above.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Osuji, *Where is Truth?*, 119–161, O'Connor, "Do not Trim," 627–630, Carroll, *Chaos*, 93–94. McKane (*Jeremiah* 2:666) traces the linkage of the *אליהגד דבר* clause with a series of collected oracles over time back to the work of Bernhard Duhm, an observation which contributes further to a perceived link between chapters 26 and 36, given the possibility that

chapters 1–25 focus more closely on the prophet himself, while chapters 26–45 portray the impact of, and response to, his message, a view that may be understood to correspond nicely with the movement from a focus on Jeremiah’s message to a focus on the conflict over its reception within chap. 26 itself.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Setting and Context of the Oracle (vv. 1–3)*

#### *Introduction, Occasion, and Audience*

The account is introduced by a superscription, followed by two formulaic introductions, one in narrative voice (היה הדבר הזה מאת יהוה לאמר) and the other placed in the mouth of YHWH (כה אמר יהוה).<sup>15</sup> In addition, there are two levels to YHWH’s command, including the instruction to Jeremiah to stand in the temple court and deliver the message (vv. 2–3), as well as the prescribed content of the proclamation itself (vv. 4–6).<sup>16</sup> The text emphasizes both the comprehensive nature of the prophetic word and of its intended audience. The command that Jeremiah is to deliver כל-הדברים that he is given is paired with the injunction to not hold back, or diminish, a word of it

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chap. 36 may be similarly understood as in some sense representing most, if not all, of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry within one paradigmatic story. Cf. Holt, “Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon.”

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Clements, *Jeremiah*, 153. Cf. O’Connor, “Do not Trim.” Contrast Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 509), who discerns “no organizing principle” in chaps. 26–45.

<sup>15</sup> See the discussion of this “nesting” phenomenon, or “embedded discourse” in the book’s introductory formulae in Shead, *The Open Book*, 26–66, and Leuchter, “Medium and Message.” Unlike the majority of superscriptions introducing new sections throughout the book, Jeremiah is not here explicitly mentioned as the recipient of the divine word (compare first-person accounts of Jeremiah [“The word of the LORD came to me”] in 1:4; 2:1; 16:1 and third-person descriptions [“The word that came to Jeremiah...”] in 1:1–2; 7:1; 11:1; 14:1; 18:1; 21:1; 25:1, and throughout chaps. 27–52). In fact, the prophet will not be mentioned at all until verse 7, when the priests and the prophets are described as hearing what he has proclaimed in the temple. Nevertheless, there is little question that the recipient of YHWH’s word and command is Jeremiah.

<sup>16</sup> While the absence of על ירמיהו in v. 1 is attested in MT, LXX, Vulg. and Targum, Jeremiah is explicitly introduced as the addressee in the Old Latin and Syriac versions. Jan de Waard cites approvingly the decision of most standard English translations to follow MT on the basis that “the receptor language makes it sufficiently clear who the implicit addressee of the prophetic message is” (de Waard, *Handbook on Jeremiah*, 113). de Waard does not express opposition to the inclusion of an explicit “to Jeremiah” in efforts at a functional equivalence translation; however he is critical of attempts to defend such an inclusion on the basis of textual evidence. On the other hand, several modern commentators have followed the OL and Syr. versions (e.g. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:101), perhaps on the assumption that its omission in MT stems from a scribal error or oversight. Holladay (*Jeremiah* 2:102) notes a similar dynamic in the versions of 19:1, and finds in this evidence of common authorship: “...the fact that a personal reference was not considered necessary points for both passages toward Baruch.”



(אלי־תגרע דבר), perhaps foreshadowing the severity and difficulty of the message and its potential implications for Jeremiah. In addition, the directive to speak על־כל־ערי יהודה (v. 2), combined with the sense of “each one” (איש) in v. 3, suggests that the intended audience of the oracle is by no means limited to those present in the temple on this particular occasion but extends to the nation as a whole.<sup>17</sup> Together, these features contribute to a focus on the divine authority of the prophetic word, the unity of its message, and the extent of its intended audience.

Whereas the episode in Jer. 7:1–15 was said to take place at the gate (שער) of the בית־יהוה, the present scene takes place in the temple’s court (הצר), yet both texts envision the audience as people who have gathered in the temple to worship YHWH. The somewhat ambiguous construction raises the question of whether the intended audience for Jeremiah’s oracle ought to be understood as the nation of Judah as a whole, represented by those who happen to be present in the temple at the time, or as a more specific group of religious leaders and worshippers who would be gathered for a particular liturgical purpose.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, both Jer. 7 and 26 may be understood to address a relatively narrow group of people who happen to have been in the temple on this particular occasion. On the other hand, many interpreters understand כל־ערי יהודה (26:2) as a metonymy for “all *the people of the cities of Judah*,” and the OG version offers a similar, all-encompassing perspective on the audience of the oracle (χρηματιεῖς ἅπασιν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐρχομένοις προσκυνεῖν ἐν οἴκῳ κυρίου), suggesting that the prophetic message is intended not only for those present on this particular occasion.<sup>19</sup>

A number of commentators suggest, with greater or lesser degrees of certainty, that the phrase בראשית ממלכות should be understood as a technical term for the accession

<sup>17</sup> Bearing in mind the close connection between Jer. 7:2 and 26:2, the latter may be understood as an interpretation and extension of the former. Whereas both texts envisage the temple sermon as addressed to the people הבאים להשתחוות, perhaps the mention of all *the cities of Judah* 26:2 should be taken as a gloss, functioning to extend what might otherwise be understood as an occasional message to a limited audience to the entire community.

<sup>18</sup> Note Reventlow’s (“Gattung und Überlieferung,” 335) form-critical theory that the temple sermon functioned as an *Entry Torah* (cf. Pss. 15, 24); for a critique, see McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:159–160, cf. 162.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 268.

year of the king, derived from Akkadian culture.<sup>20</sup> This hypothesis might suggest that the narrative setting means to indicate a specific cultic and political occasion, a context in which many people have come to the capital city to celebrate the accession of the new king, and particular liturgical activities would be expected to take place in the temple courts in connection with the new political situation. However, the inevitable lack of certainty with regard to a precise dating of the account should caution against placing too much emphasis upon the temporal indication of the superscription as a basis for interpreting the chapter. Hyatt's reservation is instructive:

It has been suggested that Jeremiah delivered his temple sermon at the time of Jehoiakim's coronation on New Year's Day...when great crowds would be flocking to the temple area. While this is possible, we cannot be certain, since we do not know the precise meaning of the phrase just discussed, and we have little knowledge of the coronation ceremonies of the Hebrews.<sup>21</sup>

Adding to Hyatt's reservations, it may be noted that if this occasion is to be understood as Jehoiakim's accession or coronation, it is odd that he does not seem to be present and does not feature in the direct narrative action.

What is not in doubt is that the narrative is explicitly set within the context of Jehoiakim's reign, and that a liturgical occasion is envisaged in which the temple will be bustling during the delivery of Jeremiah's oracle. These features of the text are a sufficient basis for understanding the dynamics of the narrative episode, rendering unnecessary tentative attempts to establish a precise date or a particular cultic occasion. Thus, the setting established by the opening verses appears both to portray a specific episode involving the prophet Jeremiah and worshippers in the temple, and also to make suggestive allusions to the central thrust of his prophetic ministry as a whole which, despite its complexity, may be understood as involving a consistent message calling on the nation of Judah to turn back to YHWH in order to avoid the judgment of exile.

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<sup>20</sup> Holladay (*Jeremiah*, 2:103) traces this argument back to Joachim Begrich (1929), and concludes: "Aside from the 'thirteenth year of Josiah' itself (1:2), this is the earliest dated event of Jrm's career." See also the discussions in Hyatt, "Beginning of Jeremiah's Prophecy," 205ff. and cf. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 171, Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 523-524. In contrast, Lundbom (*Jeremiah* 21-36, 285-286) maintains that the phrase has the basic, non-technical sense of communicating a temporal setting sometime during the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, though he is still open to the possibility that the event takes place during the accession year, more generally speaking.

<sup>21</sup> Hyatt, "Jeremiah," 1006.

On the basis of her contention that 26:4–6 represents an “abridgment” of the temple sermon in Jer. 7, Scalise argues, “The command not to withhold a word...must have to do with the authenticity of the message rather than its comprehensiveness.”<sup>22</sup> Likewise, O’Connor suggests that, “By radically abridging the sermon to three verses (26:4–6), the narrator himself ironically disregards Yahweh’s warning not to trim a word.”<sup>23</sup> However, such construals appear to be based upon the assumption the concern of the warning is over precise wording and content rather than over the temptation to soften the message in light of its potentially negative reception and implications. Instead, the *אל-תגרע דבר* clause may be understood not as a wooden, literal command, but rather as a rhetorically idiomatic emphasis on the central content of the prophetic message. Rather than creating a distinction between the concepts of authenticity and comprehensiveness, it is preferable to note that the prohibition on diminishing the oracle indicates both its divine authority and its severity, so that what is at stake is a concern over the possibility that Jeremiah might lose his nerve and thus compromise a difficult message, and not necessarily that every literal word would be repeated precisely and verbatim. Moreover, despite her intriguing suggestion that chapter 26 is a midrash on the temple sermon of chap. 7, O’Connor here seems to neglect the possibility that by referencing the central thrust of the message of chap. 7 the narrator may be intentionally signaling the whole of the passage, rather than deliberately omitting part of it in blatant disregard of the divine warning.<sup>24</sup>

The rationale that forms the basis of what Jeremiah has been commanded to do and say is immediately given, as YHWH communicates his desire that the people would hear (*שמע*) and turn (*שוב*), each one from his/her evil way (*איש מדרכו הרעה*), in

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<sup>22</sup> Scalise, in *Jeremiah* 26–52, 13. However, she goes on to note: “If the goal of repentance is to be achieved, the *full message* in all its harshness must be heard” (my emphasis). The tension between these closely connected statements in Scalise’s treatment suggests that she recognizes the dynamic of obedience that will become increasingly significant in the case of oracles that will be especially difficult or confrontational, and yet she is hesitant to give too much weight to the command not to omit anything since this is precisely what the kind of abridgment she posits entails.

<sup>23</sup> O’Connor, “Do Not Trim,” 620.

<sup>24</sup> On possible reasons that a prophet might be inclined to withhold, or diminish a received message, see Janzen, “Withholding the Word.” cf. discussion in Miller, *Jeremiah*, 722.

order that YHWH might relent (נָחַם) from the evil which he was going to do on account of their evil doings (v. 3).<sup>25</sup> Thus, in a way that differs strikingly from the account of the temple sermon in chap. 7, here, prior to expressing the particular content of the message to be proclaimed in the temple court, YHWH reveals to his prophet the motivation in which the message of judgment is grounded. Although the warning against compromising the message (v. 2) does foreshadow its harsh and demanding character, and the language of people turning from their evil way (דָּרַךְ + רָעָה) so that YHWH might likewise relent from carrying out his corresponding רָעָה is likewise suggestive of the severity of the oracle which is to come, it is suggested in v. 3 that the importance of the oracle lies not in its severity as such, but rather in its desired intention to move the people of Judah toward repentance so that the threatened judgment need not be carried out.

The motif according to which human rebellion, characterized as רָעָה or רָע, is envisioned as bringing about corresponding divine judgment in the form of רָעָה or רָע is a prominent one in the book of Jeremiah, and is more broadly representative of a way of conceiving the relationship between sin and judgment throughout prophetic literature.<sup>26</sup> In his monograph, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets*, Patrick D. Miller examines various patterns of correspondence between human rebellion and divine judgment as portrayed in the biblical prophetic literature, concluding that while there is ample evidence for the theological principle that human sin brings about its own inherent consequences, there remains also an unmistakable emphasis on the causal relationship between sin and judgment and the divine decision to bring about the latter as a form of retribution or punishment for the former.<sup>27</sup> In summarizing the results of his analysis, Miller explains:

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<sup>25</sup> See Fabry (TDOT IX:340-355) on נָחַם. Although the term אָוִלִי may be understood merely as an indication of contingency, rather than an explicit indication of YHWH's desired outcome, the syntax of the passage strongly suggests an expression of the divine rationale for the prophetic message. The converted perfect form וְנָחַמְתִּי may be understood to express a modal sense and a consequential relationship to the previously-stated possibility that the people might listen and turn. See Joüon-Muraoka, §119.

<sup>26</sup> See also Jer. 11:17; 18:7-11; 23:10-12; cf. 1 Kgs. 14:7-16 and 2 Kgs. 21:10-15.

<sup>27</sup> The former element is especially emphasized by Koch in his influential essay: "Gibt Es Ein Vergeltungsdogma." Cf. the abridged English translation in Crenshaw, ed., *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, 57-87.

One of the clear conclusions of this study is that a notion of retributive justice is not incompatible with an understanding of divine judgment wrought out in the processes of history. The correlation of sin and judgment while effected by Yahweh is not manifest in a capricious and irrational way unconnected to the nexus of events, as if it were an 'act of God' in the sense that insurance companies use such a term, a bolt of lightning from the sky that suddenly destroys. There is no such trivialization of the notion of judgment in the passages studied. On the contrary, they reveal a kind of synergism in which divine and human action are forged into a single whole or the divine intention of judgment is wrought out through human agency. Rarely does the punishment or judgment happen immediately when it is pronounced. The prophet declares Yahweh's will, which in and through coming events will work itself out.<sup>28</sup>

This complex portrayal in which an inherent correspondence between sin and judgment is held in some tension with the notion of divine agency bringing about the judgment as a consequence of human sin is evidenced throughout the book of Jeremiah.<sup>29</sup> Miller highlights Jer. 6:19 as a paradigmatic example, wherein רעה is identified as the "fruit" of the people's rebellion (פרי מהשבותם), and yet the causal element and the explicit role of divine action in bringing about the disaster (אנכי מביא רעה) are also emphasized.<sup>30</sup> Jer. 26:3 offers a similar vision of inherent correspondence and divine retribution, yet it is set in the more positive context of YHWH's expressed desire that the people might hear and repent. The logic of the purpose statement which lies behind the oracle to follow (i.e. vv. 4–6) reveals that just as both inherent consequence and divine agency are involved in the correspondence between sin and punishment, there exists a similar interrelationship envisioned in the way that human repentance, i.e. turning (שוב) from רעה, might bring about a divine relenting (נחם) from רעה.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Oracle Delivered in the Temple (vv. 4–6)*

Once YHWH has introduced the importance of communicating the full weight of the prophetic oracle and the merciful divine rationale that undergirds it (vv. 1–3), he proceeds to reveal the content of the message to be proclaimed in the temple court.

<sup>28</sup> Miller, *Sin and Judgment*, 138. See also Miller, "Slow to Anger," 269–285.

<sup>29</sup> Miller discusses Jer. 14:16, 21:14 and 50:15 in this connection.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, *Sin and Judgment*, 127.

<sup>31</sup> Although translating both שוב and נחם as "repent" might bring out this sense of correspondence nicely, it is preferable to highlight the distinction between the Hebrew terms, so that the parallelism is distinguished slightly from the use of רעה/רע to denote both sin and judgment.

Importantly, Jeremiah is not here instructed to reveal to the people YHWH's stated desire to relent, but is sent to speak only the message of judgment itself.<sup>32</sup> The prophet has been given a special insight into the divine motivation behind the oracle which he is not commanded to share, presumably because the rhetorical force and intention of the message would be diminished by such a full disclosure.<sup>33</sup> What Jeremiah is to say involves a strictly conditional statement: If the people refuse to listen (שמע) – a form of receiving the prophetic message which involves not merely hearing words but also responding by walking in *Torah* and heeding the words of YHWH's servants the prophets, all of which the people have not done thus far – then destruction will come upon both the temple and the city.<sup>34</sup>

The conditional nature of the message to be proclaimed in the temple is not only signaled by YHWH's stated rationale in v. 3 but also syntactically indicated by the "If...then" construction (-ו...אם) of vv. 4–6. The protasis is stated negatively, in terms of the potential failure of the people of Judah to respond appropriately to both YHWH and his prophets, while the apodosis is stated positively, in terms of a divine threat to destroy, or perhaps to abandon, both the temple and the city.<sup>35</sup> A distinctive and noteworthy feature of this construction is the interruption of the warning against *potential* failure in order to stress that the people have already demonstrated their failure and, therefore, according to the logic of the warning, they already stand in peril of incurring the promised judgment of v. 6. This is not a picture of setting out the initial terms of a covenant relationship so as to be clear about what is and is not acceptable,

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<sup>32</sup> This dynamic is evident elsewhere in Jeremiah, most notably in Jer. 18. For discussion see Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 49–54; cf. idem., *Old Testament Theology*, 127.

<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that although Jeremiah is not explicitly told to share this rationale here, neither is he prohibited from doing so. Moreover, Jeremiah does disclose the logic of v. 3 subsequently, in v. 13, apparently by his own volition as there is no divine command to do so.

<sup>34</sup> Given the allusion to Shiloh in v. 6, in the light of my argument in chapter 4 above, it is possible that v. 6 also signals the potential withdrawal of divine presence from the midst of YHWH's covenant people.

<sup>35</sup> This particular construction of the conditional warning represents one of many key differences between chapters 7 and 26. In Jer. 7:3 and the more elaborate 7:5–7, both the protasis and apodosis are stated positively in order to yield what is more of a promise than a threat (although it should be noted that the secondary comment of 7:6 on what it means to 'execute judgment' [v.5] is stated in negative terms of the kind of behavior to avoid). In that context, the amending of ways and doing of justice will result in YHWH dwelling with his people.

but a gracious extending of a second chance, the voicing of an opportunity for obedient response despite recent and persistent failure to do so.<sup>36</sup>

*The Condition: Hearing and Responding to the Prophetic Word*

The root שמע appears 3 times in this short passage (vv. 4, 5 [x2]) in order to establish the central thrust of what YHWH requires of his people. This common verb can, of course, involve the narrower sense of literally hearing or listening, as well as more nuanced connotations of active engagement with what is being, or has been, heard.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the term often is used to signify not only the actual hearing but the active response to what is heard in terms of understanding, appropriating, and, in the case of apodictic language, responding with obedience.<sup>38</sup> In vv. 4–5, the kind of response that is envisioned is reinforced by the subsequent infinitival forms, which specify that hearing YHWH would entail walking in Torah (ללכת בתורת) and listening (לשמע) to the message of the prophets that he sends.<sup>39</sup> In contrast to McKane's suggestion that v. 5 is a "wordy intervention" that "obstructs the flow of the sense and...distracts attention from the present appeal of the prophet to his audience," I maintain that the verse reinforces key elements of the narrative's central focus by referring to the historical pattern of prophetic confrontation of YHWH's people and their stubborn refusal to heed, with an emphasis on YHWH's persistence that corresponds to the divine rationale revealed in v. 3.<sup>40</sup> While the formulaic language and the apparently parenthetical interjection ולא שמעתם do contribute to the verse's slightly awkward syntax, and may very well suggest the activity of an editorial hand, it would be entirely plausible to construe such compositional intervention as an interpretative contribution

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<sup>36</sup> To some extent, a similar dynamic is operative in chap. 7, where the warning against trusting in deceptive words (v. 4) and committing various forms of injustice (v. 6) is combined with the announcement that this is precisely what the people have been doing (vv. 8ff.).

<sup>37</sup> See Aitken in *NIDOTTE*, 4:175-181. The narrower sense of the verb is evident in the report of the priests and prophets hearing Jeremiah's oracle in vv. 7 and 11 in the present passage; however, it is worth noting that part of the point being made within the account is that by limiting their interaction to a narrow sense of auditory recognition, those who have witnessed Jeremiah's oracle demonstrate what it is to 'hear' and yet fail to truly *hear*. See further discussion below, and cf. Scalise, in *Jeremiah* 26-52, 14, 19.

<sup>38</sup> See *BDB*, 1033-1034.

<sup>39</sup> On the use of the infinitive construct to modify or specify the action of a preceding verb, see Joüon-Muraoka, §124 o. See also Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 369.

<sup>40</sup> On the apparent syntactical awkwardness of v. 5 see the discussion of McKane, *Jeremiah*, 2:666-667.

derived from a clear sense of the overarching concerns of the present passage and the developing Jeremiah tradition, rather than the inappropriate or distracting intervention of a heavy hand.

The reference to obeying *Torah* involves both the ubiquitous biblical image of walking, as indicative of conducting one's life in obedient correspondence to the ways of YHWH, and a reference to YHWH's revelation of those ways (אשר נתתי לפניכם) in order to enable such obedience. Thus, the image is not of obedience in the abstract, but of participating in the covenant established between YHWH and Israel. In verse 5, the notion of hearing and obeying God himself by walking in his *Torah* is connected to the requirement of giving the same obedient attention to the words of YHWH's appointed messengers, designated as עבדי הנבאים.<sup>41</sup> The logic of the passage indicates that the words of these appointed messengers possess the same authority, and thus deserve the same obedient response, as YHWH's *Torah* itself, by virtue of the prophets having been sent (שלח) by YHWH.<sup>42</sup> The action of sending is modified by the idiom והשכם ושלח, communicating a sense of frequency and persistence.<sup>43</sup> Far from exhibiting the supposed caprice and vitriol sometimes associated with expressions of divine judgment in the Old Testament, this prophetic oracle is at pains to emphasize that YHWH has been both gracious in establishing revelatory instruction and guidance for his people, and persistent in sending messengers to reinforce and call attention back to the ways of *Torah*. It is in this context of divine-human relationship that the threatened consequences for the nation's failure to heed and obey are best understood.

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<sup>41</sup> An important motif in the book of Jeremiah, this designation for a tradition of prophetic activity appears in Jer. 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; and 44:4.

<sup>42</sup> See Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 4, for a construal of prophecy that relies heavily upon the connection between divine sending and prophetic authenticity, as well as pp. 46-47 and 75-82 for the way this dynamic functions in the book of Jeremiah. See also the discussion of 26:12-15 below.

<sup>43</sup> Literally, "rising up early," this root (שכם) is sometimes used verbally to refer simply to arising early in the morning (e.g. Gen. 22:3; Judg. 19:5) but here involves the figurative sense of persistent repetition (cf. Zeph. 3:7). Various forms of this motif of persistence are found throughout Jeremiah, with the subject nearly always being God (25:3 is the main exception, but Jeremiah's agency is closely connected with YHWH's in this case). It appears in the present form, in connection with the עבדי הנבאים motif, also in 7:25; 25:4; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4. Additionally, forms of השכם are used in conjunction with the verb דבר in Jer. 7:13; 25:3; 35:14, with העיד in 11:7, and with למד in 32:33. In each case, the idiom features the infinitive absolute form of the verb coupled with שכם, being used to modify a preceding form of the same verbal root, in a way that "expresses the repetition or continuation of the action" (Joüon-Muraoka § 123 r).



As indicated above, the warning of judgment speaks of a two-fold consequence in the event that the people do not fulfill what is required of them. In what is often regarded as among the more explicit links between chapters 7 and 26, YHWH threatens to make the temple כְּשֵׁלָה, and adds that he will make the city a curse (קִלְלָה) to/for all other nations (v. 6).<sup>44</sup> Not only do the allusion to Shiloh's fate and its rhetorical use as a precedent constitute an overt link to Jer. 7:12–15, but the dual concern over the fate of the city and the temple recalls the emphasis on both temple and land throughout chapter 7.<sup>45</sup> It was noted in the previous chapter that attempts to understand what is intended by the reference to the former cultic center of Shiloh in the temple sermon have often focused on questions of dating and archaeological excavations at Khirbet Seilun, the contemporary site associated with the ancient city, but the significant limitations of these sources of information must be taken seriously and in turn raise hermeneutical questions about the extent to which historical information about a geographical referent might be necessary for interpreting a biblical passage in which it is contained.<sup>46</sup> The crucial interpretative point to reiterate is that an understanding of the function of the Shiloh comparison in the context of Jeremiah's temple sermon does not necessarily depend upon a precise dating or historical accounting of the cultic site's fate. The weight of the comparison, as in 7:1–15, falls primarily upon the recognition that Shiloh once functioned as a privileged locale in which YHWH's presence was

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<sup>44</sup> On the *Kethib/Qere* in v. 6, see Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 2:100, and Driver, "Hebrew Notes," 244–245.

<sup>45</sup> While there is an obvious difference between the focus on the city (עִיר) in 26:6, 9 (cf. v. 18) and the focus on the land (אֶרֶץ) in 7:7 (cf. vv. 3, 14), it is reasonable to suggest a degree of overlap between the fates of these three entities (city, land, and temple), because of their interrelationship (26:18), because of the ambiguity of the term מְקוֹם in chap. 7, and because of the way that 26:20 virtually equates Uriah's prophecy against city and land with Jeremiah's words against the temple and the city.

<sup>46</sup> See further Gilmour, "Shiloh," 893–895. Although Shiloh is central to the narrative of 1 Sam. 1–4, additional biblical mentions of it are limited to a handful of episodes in the Deuteronomistic History (eg: Judg. 18:1–10; 21:19; Josh. 24:25–26) and brief references in Ps. 78 and Jer. 7:12–14; 26:6, 9; 41:5. A detailed and nuanced account of the biblical portrayal of Shiloh and its role in broader trajectories in the history of Hebrew Bible scholarship is offered by Schley, *Shiloh: A Biblical City*.

mediated to his people, and now no longer does so as a result of divine judgment (cf. 7:12).<sup>47</sup> It is this fate that the temple in Jerusalem is now in danger of sharing.

As in chapter 7, the response of the people of Judah to the prophetic word will have implications for both the temple and the land. Although in this context it is primarily the city of Jerusalem itself that is threatened, the motif of becoming a curse is used throughout the book of Jeremiah with reference to the people (24:9; 42:18; 44:8, 12), the city/cities (25:18; 26:6), and the land (44:22), suggesting a degree of interrelationship between the city of Jerusalem and the land as a whole.<sup>48</sup> As noticed in the above comments on 26:2, the cities of Judah can function as a metonym which indicates the inhabitants of those cities; more importantly, the contexts of chapters 25, 26 and 44 clearly indicate that the people are included in the threat of judgment, and that fates of the city and the land are inseparably bound up with the judgment of the people.<sup>49</sup> The nature and scope of the impending judgment will cause the object of that judgment to become a paradigmatic representative of divine retribution, and to serve as an example to other nations who have witnessed or heard of what has taken place.<sup>50</sup>

To construe this pervasive Jeremianic motif, including the particular instance of it in v. 6, merely as a general indication of divine judgment or simply as denoting the

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<sup>47</sup> Scalise (in *Jeremiah 26–52*, 17) emphasizes the rhetorical dynamic of exile involving a reversal of privileged cultic status as central to the logic of Jeremiah's oracle, explaining that, "The canonical portrayal of Shiloh establishes its superiority to all other places of worship of the LORD before the temple was built in Jerusalem but then proclaims Shiloh's rejection in Jerusalem's favor. Descriptions of Shiloh's fall focus upon rejection and abandonment rather than destruction."

<sup>48</sup> The notion that Jerusalem, along with the entire land of Judah and its inhabitants, would become a curse is a recurrent theme throughout the book of Jeremiah (cf. 24:9; 25:18; 29:22; 42:18; 44:8, 12, 22). The motif also appears once in the oracles against the nations (Jer. 49:13 MT), as Bozrah is threatened with a similar fate. The term קללה is often associated with analogous terms, such as אלה (an oath), חרפה (a reproach), משל (a proverb, or parable), שנינה (a taunt, a by-word), שריקה (an object of [derisive] hissing), as well as particular recurring terms which denote extensive destruction, i.e. חרבה (a desolation, a ruin), שמה (a waste, a horror).

<sup>49</sup> Jeremiah 25 is an especially good example of this interrelationship: YHWH's judgment is expressed as a reality that will befall both the land itself and its inhabitants (25:9, 13–14), and both categories are subsequently specified further as Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, as well as the kings and princes who function as representatives of all the people (25:18).

<sup>50</sup> The slightly different usage in 29:22 is suggestive of the logic of the motif, as it envisions a specific curse being used in relation to the judgment which has befallen Ahab and Zedekiah (cf. 22:8–9). This example is unique in its explicit portrayal of the curse as a verbal act used in connection with the fate of individuals who have experienced YHWH's judgment, yet it is clear that the same logic is implicit in each of the instances noted above.

threat of deportation as a common feature of life in ancient Near East, here interpreted through the lens of theodicy, would be to miss crucial theological dynamics of what it seeks to communicate. The overwhelming sense of the way the term is used in the book of Jeremiah, in conjunction with its various synonyms and associated terminology, is to indicate that the fate of the people would serve as a paradigmatic image among all other nations of the severity of divine judgment. The concept of becoming a curse in this way both recalls and inverts the motif of becoming a blessing so central to the Abraham narrative in Genesis, a dynamic that, in turn, is suggestive of the conditional logic inherent in the paraenetic language of covenant blessings and curses in Deut. 28.<sup>51</sup> Thus, this dual threat is a forceful expression not merely of a terrible fate in general but functions as a reversal of precisely the unique relationship and special status the people of Israel are elsewhere understood to enjoy, namely as the chosen people and treasured possession (סגולה) of God (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:8), as a consequence of covenantal failure and disobedience.

Furthermore, the language used to indicate the nature and scope of the destruction which will cause the people to become a curse is consistently suggestive not only of structural ruin but also of emptiness and removal of its inhabitants.<sup>52</sup> This semantic observation provides further evidence that the fate of becoming a curse applies to the city, its inhabitants and the land as a whole, even where only one entity is explicitly indicated. More importantly, this language confirms that the judgment envisioned involves a conditional, covenantal dynamic, whereby desolation is not merely an accidental result of military conquest and ancient political convention (*even if* this is construed in terms of judgment, theodicy, divine agency), but rather is construed as the fitting consequence of covenant failure, the fulfillment of the precise

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<sup>51</sup> McKane (*Jeremiah*, 2:673) compares the universality of 26:6 with that of Gen. 12:3 and argues that they ought to be interpreted in a similar way: “the one makes Israel a paradigm of a blessed nation and the other shows to the world what a nation looks like when it is under a curse.” Moberly (*Theology of the Book of Genesis*, 150-155) draws a similar contrast between Gen. 12:3 and Jer. 24:8–9, explaining that the purpose of the idiom in both its positive and negative forms is not to indicate the efficacy of either blessing or curse but rather to illustrate “the paradigmatic condition of the one whose name is invoked” (154).

<sup>52</sup> In fact, language of destruction and desolation consistently associated with the term קללה (see above) is elsewhere consistently associated with the motif מאין יושב (“without inhabitant”). See Jer. 4:7; 9:11; 26:9; 33:10; 44:22; 46:19; 48:9; 51:29, 37. cf. also variations on the theme using different terminology in Jer. 4:29; 44:2; 50:3; 51:62.

form of judgment which is elsewhere promised to result from failing to meet the conditions of the covenant established between YHWH and Israel.<sup>53</sup>

Together, then, the Shiloh reference and the motif of becoming a curse communicate both the removal of privileged status for Jerusalem and its temple, and the inversion of that status for the city, its inhabitants, and the land as a whole in the context of covenantal judgment. The conditional logic of the temple oracle is enhanced by the nature of the threat contained in the apodosis, creating a kind of double-logic of conditionality. While the structure and content of vv. 4–6 as a whole communicates already the conditional nature of divine judgment, the reference to Shiloh, the indication that Jerusalem might come to share its fate, and the language of becoming a curse together indicate the conditionality of divine promises as well, which may be forfeited as a result of continued disobedience and failure to repent. The oracle as a whole thus reinforces the logic of contingency inherent in the divine-human covenantal relationship, the fate of which is so central to the book of Jeremiah. Neither the promise of divine presence among the chosen and treasured possession of YHWH, nor the looming threat of divine judgment on account of their rebellion can be taken for granted; both are dependent upon the appropriate response of the people to the message of repentance and amendment that YHWH – through the prophet Jeremiah, and through his servants the prophets – has persistently been communicating.

### *Construing the Conditional Dynamic*

For some interpreters, the portrayal of YHWH's stated intention in v. 3 constitutes an example of a conditional strand of material that may be distinguished from a more pessimistic strand emphasizing instead the inevitability of judgment. For example, Thiel distinguishes admonitions (*Mahnungen*) in both Jer. 7 and 26 that he attributes to the editorial redaction (*Bearbeitung*) of D, from the words of judgment (*Gerichtsworte*) found in vv. 6 and 9 (cf. 7:14), largely on the basis of an identification of idiomatic or formulaic constructions.<sup>54</sup> According to Sharp, construing such a juxtaposition within

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<sup>53</sup> e.g. Lev. 26:14–35; Deut. 28:15–68.

<sup>54</sup> Thiel (*deuteronomistische Redaktion* 1–25, 115–118. Yet, see Stipp's recent discussion ("Formulaic Language," 159ff.), where he makes the methodological point: "Any reconstruction trying to eliminate the formulaic portions must depend purely on language because the passages concerned are seamlessly integrated into their contexts. Some of the set phrases disregarded by

the compositional history of the text accounts for the awkward syntax created by the formulaic motif in v. 5, the apparent discrepancy between Jeremiah's oracle (vv. 4–6) and the reports of it in vv. 9 and 11, and the difficulty in determining the role of כִּלְיָהֶם throughout the passage.<sup>55</sup> For others, the stated divine intention in v. 3 simply reveals the extent to which both the deity and his prophetic representative have failed in accomplishing their purposes, since the context of the book of Jeremiah as a whole reveals that the envisioned human repentance and consequent divine relenting did not in fact take place.<sup>56</sup> For example, Carroll argues that v. 3 belongs, along with vv. 13 and 19, “to the editorial strand which presents the story as a call to change,” and suggests that the tradents represented by this strand sought to salvage the prophetic reputations of both Jeremiah and Micah by portraying them as prophets of repentance, in order to resolve the dissonance caused by their failed predictions.<sup>57</sup>

Both of the approaches represented above operate with the problematic assumption that expressions of imminent judgment in apparently unconditional terms and calls to repentance in explicitly conditional form are mutually exclusive, or at least inherently incompatible, the same assumption that underlies some versions of the inviolability hypothesis.<sup>58</sup> However, an alternative account is possible. For one thing, the claim of theological incoherence frequently depends upon the theological presuppositions of interpreters.<sup>59</sup> While such hermeneutical influence need not be lamented as an inevitable liability, it should be recognized that what appears to be incongruous according to one theological framework might be understood in another

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Hyatt and Thiel are even so tightly interwoven with their environments that they simply cannot be removed without harming the textual flow” (160).

<sup>55</sup> Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 57-59.

<sup>56</sup> For this reading of Jer. 26 in particular, see Carroll, “Prophecy, Dissonance;” for a more general application of the same hypothesis in the interpretation of prophetic literature, see idem, *When Prophecy Failed*, 1979.

<sup>57</sup> See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 515-519, here citing 519. Carroll regards vv. 3–6, 13 as the conditional strand and vv. 9, 11–12 as the absolute element within the main part of the passage (i.e. vv. 1–16), and he connects the conditional strand closely with the function of the Micah citation in vv. 17–19.

<sup>58</sup> Although John Skinner's approach has largely fallen out of favor in Jeremiah studies, and for many good reasons (see especially the discussion in Carroll, *Chaos to Covenant*, 5-30), his nuanced discussion of the relationship between what he calls the “conditional” and “absolute” dynamics of Jeremiah's prophetic speech provides an instructive contrast to these sorts of assumptions. See Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*, 74-79.

<sup>59</sup> See the discussion in Fretheim, “The Character of God in Jeremiah,” 212-219.

in more constructive terms as tension, mystery, or paradox.<sup>60</sup> Thus, both Sharp's account of "irreducible theological tensions" as well as Carroll's account of failed prophecy and subsequent rationalization may be regarded as contingent hypotheses based upon particular sets of assumptions and presuppositions.

Second, a compelling case may be made for the plausibility of taking expressions of apparently inevitable judgment as rhetorically designed to provoke repentance on the part of their hearers, and thus as inherently conditional.<sup>61</sup> For example, commenting on Jer. 26:3, Theodoret of Cyrus explains, "He did not use the word 'perhaps' [ἴσως] out of ignorance, aware as he was of their disobedience; instead he expressed the uncertainty to avoid their taking note of the divine sentence and despairing of salvation."<sup>62</sup> Rather than reading ἴσως as indicative of divine uncertainty, Theodoret understands the apparent tension between the proclamation of divine judgment and possibility of repentance as a feature of rhetorical persuasion. He sees this language as a way of avoiding strict determinism, so that the audience would be able to see the possibility still for their change in behavior.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the account of the temple sermon in chap. 26 may itself be understood as providing an interpretation of Jer. 7:1–15 that highlights and confirms the inherently conditional nature of its message. Not only do vv. 3–6 introduce an explicitly contingent and compassionate divine rationale as the motivation for the oracle, but numerous other elements of the latter narrative may be understood as hermeneutical

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<sup>60</sup> This recalls the discussion of Ricoeur's account of *emplotment* in chapter two above.

<sup>61</sup> This case is made with reference to the book of Jeremiah by Moberly (*Prophecy and Discernment*, 50–52). Moberly interprets passages in which God demands repentance from evil and, on that condition being fulfilled, promises to relent from bringing judgment/disaster as illustrative of the "response-seeking" nature of prophetic speech. For Moberly, Jer. 18:7–10 is the focal point of this axiomatic theological principle, serving as both "...a kind of commentary on the purpose of Jeremiah's commissioning [i.e. Jer. 1:4–10]," and "...a striking formulation of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility."

<sup>62</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 103.

<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Keil and Delitzsch refer to the words of Jeremiah in chapter 26 as a "peremptory declaration," and they argue that he sought by this authoritative speech to actually move the people toward repentance. They point to the 'don't hold back a word' clause (v. 3) as evidence of this "peremptory character of the discourse," citing analogous commands in Deut. 4:2 and 13:1. The commentators explain, "[Jeremiah] is to proclaim the word of the Lord in its full unconditional severity, to move people, if possible, to repentance..." (242).

guides for the theological interpretation of the earlier account.<sup>64</sup> For example, there is a striking contrast between the persistent omission of the conditional dynamic within the reports of the priests and the prophets (and the people) in vv. 9 and 11, and the reiteration of it, along with the revelation of the divine rationale, in Jeremiah's speech from v. 12–15. In addition, the two precedents cited in vv. 18–23 reinforce this contrast by portraying both a paradigmatic instance of appropriate response to a conditional prophetic warning of divine judgment and yet another example of a recipient who fails to truly hear and respond to the prophetic word, instead lashing out in violent resistance to it. The interpretation that follows seeks to flesh out in further detail the plausibility of this account of the hermeneutical relationship between chapters 7 and 26, suggesting that the latter provides not only a narrative complement to the former, but also an interpretation of it, which itself becomes part of the Jeremiah tradition.

### *Section 2: Conflict Initiated Over the Prophetic Message (vv. 7–15)*

The transition from vv. 1–6 to 7–15 may be understood as a kind of microcosm of the way chapter 26 itself functions as a hinge point between Jeremiah 1–25 and 26–45. At the beginning of the narrative the focus is upon YHWH and the prophetic message, which has been construed as a conditional word of judgment intended to elicit repentance and obedience. Once the nature and content of that message has been expressed (vv. 4–6), the focus shifts to the way in which the message is received within the community and the tradition. As in the macro-structure of the book, so in this immediate context: following a predominant emphasis upon the rationale for and delivery of the prophetic message itself, various characters begin to emerge,

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<sup>64</sup> On the concept of “hermeneutical guides” within the context of the transmission of pre-canonical biblical traditions, see Chapman, *Law and Prophets*, 71–110. In a thesis that involves a trenchant critique of reductive ideological accounts of the process of canon formation, Chapman has argued that the activity of the tradents involved in the transmission and compositional development of biblical literature may be understood as providing both “hermeneutical guides” to the reception of their work, and “theological judgment[s]” aimed at the preservation of what they inherited (103, 105). This language provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between Jeremiah 7 and 26 in the context of the book and the Jeremianic tradition: i.e. Jer. 26 may be understood as providing a hermeneutical guide to the reading of Jer. 7:1–15 by making interpretative and theological judgments that themselves also become part of the tradition, and ultimately, the canonical form of the book as a whole.

representing possible alternative ways of responding to his message.<sup>65</sup> The conflict between the divinely-given authority of Jeremiah's message and the various authority figures within the Judean community is such that, as the prophet's fate increasingly appears to hang in the balance, it becomes clear that the fate of the people is likewise in a precarious position, relative to their response to the prophetic message.<sup>66</sup>

Following the description of the setting, YHWH's directives, and the relating of the oracle proper (vv. 1–6), the first set of characters introduced into the narrative of are a group of prophets and priests, who, in this context, are never spoken of independently of one another.<sup>67</sup> They are joined initially to the collective designation, כל־העם, a group that remains ambiguous throughout the episode in terms of both its composition and its role in the conflict.<sup>68</sup> After the initial commotion caused by these characters (vv. 7–9), officials (שרים) of Judah arrive on the scene and are addressed with

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<sup>65</sup> Of course, many of these characters are not emerging here for the first time over the course of the book, yet it remains the case that there is a prominence given to opponents of Jeremiah and conflict scenes in chaps. 26–45 that is markedly different from the briefer appearances of these other characters in earlier sections.

<sup>66</sup> Regarding the likely impetus for the conflict in chap. 26, Hyatt suggests, "The religious leaders would have suffered greatly if the temple had been destroyed as Jeremiah predicted" (Hyatt, "Jeremiah," 1006–1007). While this is undoubtedly true, it would be misleading to focus upon the self-interest of these figures at the expense of highlighting the literary emphasis on their function as representatives of the community as a whole. The focus of the narrative is less upon the motivations that the priests and prophets might have for opposing and threatening Jeremiah, and more upon the various possible responses to the prophetic word, embodied in various representative authorities and groups.

<sup>67</sup> The OG version of Jeremiah identifies the prophets here (and elsewhere) as ψευδοπροφήτης (vv. 7, 8, 11, 16), whereas the MT makes no terminological distinction between Jeremiah's role as a נביא and various other נבאים who appear in the book (cf. Jer. 6:13; 27:9 [OG 34:9]; 28:1 [OG 35:1]; 29:1, 8 [OG 36:1, 8]). On the one hand, the OG interpretation of these characters is not entirely unreasonable, given the way that representatives of this group are critiqued, denounced, and contrasted with Jeremiah throughout the book (so, Allen, *Jeremiah*, 299; Epp-Tiessen, *Concerning the Prophets*, 147); on the other hand, it may be that retaining the ambiguity of the MT at the terminological level better highlights the corresponding ambiguity involved in discerning true from false prophecy in a way that would otherwise be diminished. For further discussion of these issues, see Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, and Epp-Tiessen, *Concerning the Prophets*.

<sup>68</sup> Sometimes referred to in the plural, as throughout Jer. 26, the prophets and priests frequently appear as a composite set of characters, and it is not uncommon for them to be addressed together along with some variation of כל־העם (e.g., Jer. 27:16; 28:1, 5; 29:1), nor for them to become the special object of YHWH's and/or Jeremiah's critique (e.g., Jer. 2:8; 5:31; 6:13/8:10; 23:11). Tiemeyer, "Priests and Temple Cult," 234, suggests that the "two-tiered religious leadership" constituted by the priests and the prophets is mirrored by Jeremiah's own dual role as prophet and priest.



a more formal accusation and threat made against Jeremiah (vv. 10–11). Jeremiah is then given an opportunity to defend himself and his actions (vv. 12–15), after which the response of the officials (v. 16) and the testimony of a further set of characters (vv. 17–24) represent various possible responses to Jeremiah and his oracle, in some contrast to the initial accusation and threat.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the latter parts of the immediate narrative, not unlike the whole of chapters 26–45, involve a complicated clash of authoritative figures over the reception and implications of the prophetic message delivered by Jeremiah.

### *Handling Jeremiah: The Initial Accusation and Threat (vv. 7–9)*

When the figure of Jeremiah is explicitly introduced into the narrative, it is in the context of the public reaction to the words he has proclaimed. The authorities present within the temple, along with members of the general populace who have gathered to worship, witness what he has said, and react hastily (vv. 7ff.).<sup>70</sup> Jeremiah's obedience to deliver כל־אשר־צוה יהוה לדבר is emphasized (v. 8), drawing attention back to the imperative against withholding any part of the message in v. 2 and highlighting the corresponding obedience of the prophet. The element of potential danger foreshadowed by the warning of v. 2 now becomes a reality as Jeremiah is seized (תפס) and threatened with death (v. 9).<sup>71</sup> Scholars are somewhat divided when it comes to the nature and tenor of the conflict scene in the temple. On the one hand, the portrayal of this group seizing Jeremiah, threatening him with death, and then gathering around/against him is suggestive of a sudden commotion and a hostile mob; on the other hand, there are indications that what is envisioned might be best construed as a more civilized, or even formal, procedure than might be apparent at first glance.

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<sup>69</sup> There is an important distinction between the characters who play a role in the narrative proper and those second-tier characters who are introduced within the context of dialogue or narrative asides (i.e. vv. 17–23). Nevertheless, although Micah, Hezekiah, Uriah and Jehoiakim are not part of the narrative proper in the same way, they still serve a representative function in terms of possible responses to the prophetic word.

<sup>70</sup> At this point the priests, the prophets and “all the people” are treated as a unit, presumably indicating everyone who would have been present in the temple on such an occasion.

<sup>71</sup> This term also appears in a subsequent account of people seizing Jeremiah and bringing him before officials in 37:13–14. It is also used elsewhere in Jeremiah to describe people being taken to exile (Jer. 34:3, 38:23).

The interpretation of this scene as a “threatening mob” may be resisted by emending the text of v. 8 so that only the priests and prophets are portrayed as seizing Jeremiah, but maintaining the reading of v. 9 MT and understanding the phrase *אֶל־יְרֵמְיָהוּ* as indicative of a lack of hostile intent.<sup>72</sup> For example, McKane recognizes the difficulties created by the shifting role of “all the people,” whose alignment with the priests and prophets against Jeremiah at this point in the narrative is suggestive of “the ‘lynching’ interpretation,” yet he regards this tension as easily resolved by conceiving of *וְכָל־הָעָם* as an intrusion in verse 8b.<sup>73</sup> If this were to be deleted, then the role of *כָּל־הָעָם* in this context would be limited to passive collective audience of Jeremiah’s oracle (vv. 7, 8a, 9), thus significantly diminishing the ambiguity surrounding their function within the narrative. On McKane’s reading, “all the people” simply indicates a large group who hear Jeremiah’s words and gather around Jeremiah subsequent to the initial seizing and accusation by the religious leadership alone.<sup>74</sup>

In contrast to this interpretation, there may be good reason for understanding the verb *קָהַל* as indicating a considerable degree of hostility regardless of what preposition it is used with, and for resisting the proposed emendation in v. 8.<sup>75</sup> However, McKane’s intuition that the textual portrayal may not be a straightforward

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<sup>72</sup> This approach is adopted by McKane (*Jeremiah* 2:661-663), who cites the interpretations of Peake and Hyatt as exceptions to the consensus of the “threatening mob” interpretation. He follows Rudolph’s contention (see *BHS*) that *וְכָל־הָעָם* in v. 8b is an unintentional scribal addition to the text derived from the preceding grouping of priests, prophets and people in v. 7a. (cf. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 169, Scalise, in *Jeremiah* 26–52, 19). The proposed emendation of v. 9 in *BHS* (attested in various Hebrew mss.) would feature the verb *קָהַל* with the preposition *עַל*, thus exhibiting more of a sense of threat or opposition. McKane notes that the prepositions *אֶל* and *עַל* seem to be employed with remarkable fluidity throughout the chapter, with the frequent substitution of *עַל* for *אֶל*.

<sup>73</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 2:662. Allen (*Jeremiah*, 299) and Nicholson (*Preaching*, 53) are among those who question the necessity of the critical proposal. Thompson (*Jeremiah*, 521) asserts, without explanation, that “all the people” in v. 8b “...must be understood as ‘some of the people.’” For such a proposal to be convincing, however, it would need at least to address why the construction could be taken in this way here and not elsewhere throughout the chapter.

<sup>74</sup> Despite his criticism of approaches that he regards as “too obviously designed to relieve the unevenness of the portrayal” (McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:662, citing Nicholson, *Preaching*, 53, n. 2), it is questionable whether McKane’s own interpretation is any less obvious in its own attempt to resolve ambiguity by resorting to emendation.

<sup>75</sup> Lundbom (*Jeremiah* 21-36, 289) likewise resists the tendency to resort to emendation, suggesting that the odd sequence of the crowd first grasping and then crowding around is “scarcely a problem in narrative writing, least of all in ancient Hebrew narrative writing, where reporting things in chronological sequence is not required.”

case of a hostile mob descending upon Jeremiah remains valuable. Rather than attempting to choose decisively between hostility and civility, I suggest that it is preferable to read the account in terms of a narrative progression: i.e. what begins as a hasty threat with openly hostile intent begins to develop into a more formal procedure. So, according to John Bright, “One gains the impression that Jeremiah was about to be lynched, but that the clergy wished his execution to be given the form of legality.”<sup>76</sup> Likewise, Leslie Allen offers this nuanced portrayal: “Presumably they do not cease to be hostile but clothe their hostility in a show of legality.”<sup>77</sup> While the root קהל can clearly lend itself to connotations of either an orderly assembly or a hostile crowd, the movement of the narrative suggests that this term functions within a summary statement which closes out the immediately preceding action.<sup>78</sup>

After Jeremiah has delivered his message, a group consisting of both leadership and laity hears what he has said (v. 7), seizes him, and then threatens him with death (v. 8); only then is the content of his proclamation called into question, once the violent accusation (מות תמות) has been made. Clearly this is not a calm, searching question about the prophet’s motives but a rhetorical one, as presumably (from the perspective of this group) Jeremiah’s guilt and fate have already been decided. If it is accepted that the appearances of כל־העם in verses 7, 8, and 9 are to be retained within the textual portrayal, then v. 9b may function as a summary of the action which has just taken place, in preparation for the transition to verse 10. In other words, the gathering

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<sup>76</sup> Bright, *Jeremiah*, 170. Whether or not this reading accurately discerns the possible motivations of the priests and the prophets, it nicely captures the sense of movement that seems to be operative in the account.

<sup>77</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, 299. Carroll’s interpretation allows for some nuance in this regard as well. Interpreting תפס as “lay hold of” or “arrest,” may suggest both an element of hostility and a sense of formal procedure simultaneously. In addition, he comments, “The crowd milling around him (v. 9b) may give the impression of a near riot, but there may be an element of a formal religious gathering against him (*qahal*, v. 17; cf. v. 9, may refer to the sacred congregation). Temple precincts, destruction of a sanctuary (Shiloh), curse, cultic officials, and the sacred congregation all point in the direction of a sacral procedure in which the accused is liable to face the death penalty for blasphemy” (Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 516).

<sup>78</sup> The term קהל is used again in 26:17 to denote the assembled people, and elsewhere in Jeremiah and in the HB it appears to be a fairly neutral term for a grouping of people or nations, not necessarily connoting violent or mob-like intent. On the other hand, however, Bright (*Jeremiah*, 170) cites 2 Sam. 20:14 as an example of קהל used in connection with warfare and Num. 16:3; 16:42 [17:7 in MT] as examples of gathering with malicious or hostile intent. Cf. O’Connor, “Do Not Trim,” p. 621.

against/around Jeremiah (v. 9) is not a separate or subsequent activity arising from innocent curiosity, since the seizing of the prophet and hasty accusation (v. 8) have already indicated both physical proximity and malicious intent; rather, the phrase וִיקָהֵל כָּל־הָעָם אֶל־יִרְמְיָהוּ may be understood as a comprehensive summation of the elements of the developing conflict that have just been described in vv. 7–8.<sup>79</sup>

The initial accusation is expressed by a declarative threat, מוֹת תָּמוּת, followed by what appear to be a rhetorical question and a citation of, or reference to, Jeremiah's own words (vv. 8b–9).<sup>80</sup> One line of interpretation understands this as a formal accusation, and therefore either as the beginning of a trial scene, or else as the accusation that causes a formal legal proceeding to come about subsequently. For example, on the basis of comparable expressions within lists of capital crimes in the Pentateuch, Scalise argues that this is, "...a second-person active form of the death sentence," and that it constitutes the "'proposed verdict' in the trial."<sup>81</sup> Likewise, Holladay interprets the phrase as a death-sentence formula, yet he concedes that, "...here the formula is not used in the official judicial sense, since the trial proper is not narrated until v 10; rather the crowd uses the formula with the connotation 'you should be sentenced to death.'"<sup>82</sup> However, a number of factors may be raised that call into question such conclusions. First, following Holladay, it should be emphasized that if one is to imagine a formal court scene developing, then the articulation of a proposed verdict at this stage, prior to the arrival of the palace officials, would seem out of

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<sup>79</sup> If this is a plausible reading, then the *vav-consecutive* form, וִיקָהֵל, might be rendered "Thus they gathered," or perhaps "So they gathered," rather than being construed as a final distinct action in a sequence. Lundbom (*Jeremiah* 21–36, 290) suggests a similar interpretation of v.9b. The verb וִיקָהֵל here is grammatically singular, yet conceptually plural, as its subject is the collective designation כָּל־הָעָם. Cf. Joüon-Muraoka §150 *e*.

<sup>80</sup> Thus, alongside the role of כָּל־הָעָם and the concept of speaking בְּשֵׁם־יְהוָה, the threat made against Jeremiah in v. 8b is one of a number of key terms and phrases that together contribute to the ambiguity of the scene that develops in ch. 26.

<sup>81</sup> Scalise, in *Jeremiah* 26–52, 20. In support of her argument, Scalise cites Pentateuchal lists of capital crimes in which the third-person passive form of the same expression appears (Exod. 21; Lev. 20; Num. 35), as well as various similar forms of the expression which she interprets as either a threat or an announcement of the death sentence.

<sup>82</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 2:105. Holladay lists parallel occurrences of the phrase in Gen. 2:17; 20:7; 1 Sam. 14:44; 22:16; 1 Kgs. 2:37, 42; 2 Kgs. 1:4, 6, 16; Ezek. 3:18; 33: 8, 14, emphasizing especially 1 Sam. 14:44 and 1 Kgs. 2:37–42 in his argument.

place.<sup>83</sup> *Ex hypothesi*, it would be preferable to distinguish between the hostile, but non-judicial, declaration of v. 8 (מות תמות) and the related formula repeated in both vv. 11 and 16 (משפט־מות), which might be understood as carrying a more formal connotation.<sup>84</sup>

Second, although it is reasonable to understand such language as alluding to various OT passages dealing with capital punishment, it does not necessarily follow from the recognition of such connections that the phrase is intended in this context to indicate a formal trial scene or to communicate a proposed verdict.<sup>85</sup> The episode may indeed portray a hostile reaction to Jeremiah's message, with underlying concerns over blasphemy and treason, without necessarily amounting to a formal trial. Thus, I propose that the initial reaction of the priests, the prophets, and all the people to Jeremiah's message ought to be understood as a death threat in the context of a sudden and hostile commotion. There is no explicit indication that they intended by their words to propose a formal verdict; rather, at this stage, the emphasis is on the commotion caused by Jeremiah's words and the sudden reaction of those who

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<sup>83</sup> Scalise notes approvingly the suggestion of H. J. Boecker that "the order of these formulas has been reversed because of the plaintiffs' excitement" (Scalise, in *Jeremiah* 26-52, 20). Yet this explanation fails to convince, not least due to the prominence of Jer. 26:8-16 within Boecker's treatment as "the only complete trial account in the OT," and the "chief model of the genre" (Scalise, in *Jeremiah* 26-52, 7; cf. Boecker, *Redeformen*). It is difficult to give assent to an interpretation that seeks to establish the details of a narrative as both paradigmatic of its genre and yet simultaneously constituting exceptions to its expected form.

<sup>84</sup> Note the claim of Holtz (in *Encyclopedia of Bible & Law*, 416) that within the context of a public offence, the accusation would have taken place in the hearing of the "adjudicatory authorities."

<sup>85</sup> According to Scalise, the various occurrences of death-sentence formulae in the Old Testament suggest four possible explanations for the capital charge being appropriate in this context: In 1 Sam. 14 and 1 Kgs. 2 the capital charge corresponds to the violation of an oath or command; in 1 Sam. 22:6-19 the phrase is used in the context of punishing treason; in Exod. 21-23; Lev. 24 and 1 Kgs. 21 it appears in connection with laws against blasphemy; in Deut. 18 the death sentence is the consequence for prophesying presumptuously. Based on the lack of explicit reference to oath violation, treason, or blasphemy, Scalise leans toward interpreting the 'proposed verdict' in connection with Deut. 18. (Scalise, in *Jeremiah* 26-52, 21). However, there is little warrant for insisting on the kind of specificity Scalise does, as it is the nature of allusion to be more suggestive than precise. Moreover, the presence of both cultic and political authority figures in the conflict that develops, as well as the prominence of both city and temple in the prophetic warning and the ensuing debate, together indicate that notions of treason and blasphemy are firmly in view although neither is explicitly introduced as a component of the accusation. Furthermore, the portrayal of prophetic speech throughout the Old Testament is so pervasively concerned with political and theological matters that the notion of engaging in such speech presumptuously or illegitimately could hardly be extricated from notions of blasphemy and treason.

witnessed them.<sup>86</sup> Whether the concerns of blasphemy, treason, and false prophecy likely raised by his audacious words will bring about anything like a formal trial remains to be seen.

*(Mis)quoting Jeremiah*

A frequently cited feature of the initial accusation is the inconsistency between Jeremiah's oracle as it appears in vv. 4–6 and the report of the priests and the prophets in v. 9. Not only have his accusers described the potential fate of the city as תהרב מאין (v. 9), in comparison with the terminology of Jeremiah's threat that it would be אתן (v. 6), but also the conditional element constituted by vv. 4–6 has apparently been omitted or disregarded. This discrepancy may be understood simply as a variation on a theme that occurs throughout the book, so that the concepts of becoming a curse to all nations and being rendered desolate need not be understood as entirely distinct, but rather as roughly synonymous ways of characterizing judgment.<sup>87</sup> However, even if this point is granted, there remains a sense in which Jeremiah's accusers here articulate a somewhat paraphrastic version of his message, and one in which much of what was emphasized by the prophet is absent.

The relationship between vv. 4–6 and v. 9 may be accounted for in a number of ways. One might conclude that Jeremiah's opponents have deliberately misconstrued, or perhaps even misunderstood his words, focusing only upon the negative element of judgment.<sup>88</sup> Alternatively, it may be argued that the religious leadership simply focus upon the element of the oracle that strikes them as blasphemous or treasonous (i.e. the threat against the temple and city), while setting aside the relatively unproblematic call to repentance and to heed YHWH.<sup>89</sup> Yet another possibility is represented by Sharp's

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<sup>86</sup> As a result, a preferable translation for מות תמות would be "you should die," or "you should be put to death."

<sup>87</sup> See also Scalise, in *Jeremiah* 26–52, 22, who comes to a similar conclusion.

<sup>88</sup> Holladay cites Schmidt (1706) as a proponent of this view. Holladay's own view (*Jeremiah* 2:105–106) is that v. 9 constitutes a paraphrase, to be attributed to the narrator rather than to the characters themselves. By omitting the protasis, he explains, "the divine message is thereby transformed from a covenant speech – in which the people are reminded that if they break their covenant obligations, Yahweh will punish them – to an announcement of divine punishment (by implication, an irrevocable one)."

<sup>89</sup> This suggestion is not unreasonable, though one would imagine that the bold indictment that the people have not been heeding the prophets (v. 5) might also be understood to have crossed a line.

hypothesis of the multiple ideological perspectives retained within the final form of the text, so that vv. 4–6 represents a redactional strand that offers a conditional perspective, holding out hope for the possibility of repentance and averting disaster, while v. 9 stems from a competing strand that is convinced of imminent judgment and thus devoid of any conditional element.<sup>90</sup>

In my view, the most helpful line of interpretation is to recognize in the words of the priests and the prophets a narrative portrayal of the extent to which these characters understand Jeremiah's message, and an indication of how they are prepared to respond to it. While there is no doubt that the message has been transformed in the words of the priests and the prophets, and that the conditional element so prominent in vv. 4–6 is basically eliminated in v. 9, the incomplete report may be understood to reflect a failure to understand the conditional dynamic within the world of the text, rather than the imposition of a particular perspective at the level of compositional technique or redaction.<sup>91</sup> Ironically, the failure of the people and leaders of Judah to hear what is arguably central to the prophetic message – i.e. YHWH's desire that his people would heed his prophets and respond with repentance and obedience (cf. v. 3) – is embodied and confirmed in the failure, or refusal, to include that central element within the rhetorical question of v. 9. Although on one level the priests, the prophets, and all the people hear (שמע) the words of Jeremiah's oracle (v. 7), the subsequent reaction, of the religious leadership at least, confirms that they have no interest in *truly* hearing him or receiving his message in the manner envisioned by YHWH's words in v. 3, or by the oracle itself in vv. 4–6.

#### *Secondary Accusation, Arrival of Political Authorities (vv. 10–11)*

Verse 10 introduces a new set of characters into the narrative, and signals a transition, as officials (שרים) from the palace arrive on the scene. It is unclear whether or not these officials have been intentionally sought out as agents who might sort out the conflict, but the narrative portrays their presence, and their exercising of a significant level of

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<sup>90</sup> So, Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 53.

<sup>91</sup> Brueggemann (*Commentary on Jeremiah*, 234) comes to a similar conclusion, while Fretheim (*Jeremiah*, 369) disagrees.

authority in the dispute, as both fitting and unproblematic.<sup>92</sup> A sequence of vav-consecutive verbal forms rapidly narrates the actions of the officials as they hear (וישמעו) of the commotion, come up (ויעלו) from the palace, and take their seat (וישביו) in the entry to the New Gate of the temple, transforming what began as a sudden conflict primarily between a lone prophetic figure and the temple establishment into a more complex encounter between various kinds of leaders in the community.<sup>93</sup>

Some commenters are too quick to identify the שרים as performing the role of judges in the proceedings, identifying them as such in a way that is both unwarranted and misleading. Although there is undoubtedly an air of formality and authority associated with the arrival of the officials, and their being seated at the gate (שער) calls to mind other texts in which important legal proceedings are conducted at similar locations, the שרים are not explicitly identified as judges in any way, and the actual role they end up playing in the episode (cf. v. 16) calls into question such an assumption.<sup>94</sup> As McKane puts it,

The שרים are not judges and a court with the peculiar composition described was not convened instantly. The שרים had been apprised that trouble was brewing in the temple court and they had come to investigate...The שרים are trouble-shooters, royal officials representing the secular arm, and are conducting a fact-finding enquiry.<sup>95</sup>

On the other hand, even if the hasty identification of the officials as court officials is resisted and the narrative is not forced into a law court paradigm that doesn't quite fit,

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<sup>92</sup> Although Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 514) remarks that it is unclear why the princes should be involved, he also comments that he is not overly puzzled because for him it is obviously not a historical narrative. He explains, "They are introduced into the story to turn the proceedings into a kind of trial. Sufficient evidence is already available to convict Jeremiah of blasphemy, but the shaping of the story by the redaction is in a different direction from that charge" (516).

<sup>93</sup> The Targum identifies this location more specifically as "the eastern door of the house of the sanctuary of the LORD" (see Hayward, *Targum of Jeremiah*). McKane (*Jeremiah* 2:663-664) identifies 'the new gate of YHWH' as "an abridged form" of 'the new gate of YHWH's house,' citing textual evidence for the longer form. The construct term 'house of' is not in LXX, but it is represented at Qumran and it seems to be included in most modern English versions as well. McKane suggests that the Targum's inclusion of 'house of' could be seen as an indication of a Hebrew *Vorlage* but is more probably an effort to connect 26:10 with 36:10.

<sup>94</sup> See Gen 23:10-20; Ruth 4:1 and Prov. 31:23 for other examples of court proceedings taking place at gates; see Edelman, "Cultic Sites," on gates in cultic sites and the temple precincts.

<sup>95</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah*, 2:680. If one imagines the likely proximity of the palace to the temple within ancient cultures, it is perhaps understandable that a commotion in the latter would draw the attention of those in the former, without necessarily postulating a formal procedure being established.



it is important to recognize that the palace officials are portrayed as possessing an authority which appears to transcend that of other figures involved. Already with their mere presence, what began as a commotion and a violent threat does appear to become a more civil dispute over what has been perceived as blasphemous and/or treasonous speech and the proposed consequences for it.

The priests and the prophets make their case against Jeremiah, and they address not only the officials but also כל־העם, who are no longer associated with the former group, but now appear together with the officials.<sup>96</sup> Carroll notes the literary dynamic created by the narrative's development, and the way that v. 11 highlights the plight of the central character, explaining, "A symmetrical structure is developing here: priests and prophets on one side, princes and people on the other side, and Jeremiah in the middle."<sup>97</sup> However, his observation fails to adequately address the discrepancy between the structure of this portrayal and the immediately preceding scene in which the people were aligned with the prophets and priests, and so some explanation is required for the apparent fluidity of their role. I have cited reasons (above) for resisting textual emendation as a way of accounting for this dynamic, and, in my view, O'Connor's hypothesis that a large group have already somehow been persuaded of the legitimacy of his message prior to his own defense and the contribution of the elders is equally unconvincing.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, the suggestion that this feature of the narrative simply indicates the vacillating or indecisive nature of the people leaves something to be desired.<sup>99</sup>

I propose that it is preferable to regard the imprecise role of various characters within the narrative, not least כל־העם, as indications of the narrative's refusal to depict a

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<sup>96</sup> It appears as though the agents involved directly in the conflict at this point are the priests and prophets, whereas the general crowd becomes associated with the officials who are trying to make sense of the dispute.

<sup>97</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 517.

<sup>98</sup> O'Connor, "Do Not Trim," 621; cf. Sharp's critique of her position (*Prophecy and Ideology*, 57). Note that Nicholson also resists Rudolph's proposal for emendation at v. 8, proposing instead a straightforward distinction between the mob denoted by כל־העם in vv. 7–9 and the formal assembly indicated by כל־העם in vv. 11–16 (*Preaching*, 53, n. 2).

<sup>99</sup> Scalise (in *Jeremiah 26–52*, 19) argues that "The effect of the shifting role of 'all the people' in this chapter is to portray them as a changeable crowd, not as a group divided into pro- and anti-Jeremiah parties." Similarly, Lundbom (*Jeremiah 21–36*, 289) sees this as an unproblematic portrayal of the "fickleness" of the crowd.

clear and consistent account of a formal trial. Instead of attempting to discern precisely what part each group is intended to play, the shifting and ambiguous roles of various characters may be understood to represent possible responses to the prophetic word. Within such an interpretative paradigm, כל־העם have already been both associated with הכהנים והנבאים (vv. 7–8), and referred to more generally on their own (v. 9). In the light of the clear transition in the episode upon the arrival of the palace officials, it is not inconceivable that they might subsequently, along with the שרים, turn their attention to the second accusation given by the priests and prophets. The more formal accusation by the priests and the prophets is relatively blunt, and its logic appears to be straightforward; according to Jeremiah's accusers, prophesying against the city is an action that is necessarily deserving of death (v. 11). The particle כי indicates an explicit causal connection between the assertion that this man deserves to die and the report of his prophesy against Jerusalem, and the emphatic clause כאשר שמעתם באזניכם implies that all who have witnessed the oracle would reasonably come to the same conclusion. Yet, a number of factors suggest that Jeremiah's accusers are either deliberately simplifying the conflict so as to remove the possibility of their position being challenged, or else they simply fail to comprehend the gravity and complexity of the situation.

The threat against the temple, which was combined with a threat against the city in Jeremiah's oracle (v. 6) and in the initial accusation (v. 9), here drops out of view, as the accusation in v. 11 focuses solely upon the city. Not unlike the dynamic explored above with reference to their direct accusation of Jeremiah (v. 9), the priests and prophets again seem to be misquoting or misrepresenting the message of Jeremiah, this time in their address to the elders and all the people.<sup>100</sup> One possible way to account for this dynamic is to construe the palace officials as primarily concerned with the secular realm of politics (i.e. treason), in contrast to the more religious concerns over blasphemy and the fate of the temple.<sup>101</sup> Along similar lines, although Jeremiah's

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<sup>100</sup> Given that the people of Judah were present for the oracle and have either witnessed or participated in one accusation already (a fact reinforced by the clause כאשר שמעתם באזניכם), it may seem odd that the prophet's accusers would deliberately leave out part of the message in an effort to manipulate; however, one need not read too much into what might simply be a rhetorically persuasive way of speaking.

<sup>101</sup> So, McKane (*Jeremiah*, 2:680) suggests that perhaps, "...a threat uttered against Jerusalem would seem more immediately seditious to the שרים than a threat against the temple."

accusers would have obvious reason to be concerned about blasphemy, perhaps they anticipate that, for the palace officials, treasonous prophetic speech against the city is warrant enough for the death penalty, so that citing the prophet's words against the temple would be superfluous.<sup>102</sup> However, this line of interpretation presupposes a distinction between religious and secular spheres that is unlikely to have been operative within this text's context of origin, and fails to account for the fact that this accusation addresses כל־העם alongside the שרים.<sup>103</sup> An alternative approach is to interpret this conspicuous omission in the light of the previous apparent misquotation of Jeremiah; that is, it may be understood both as a further indication of the logical interrelationship between the temple and the city, so that the destruction of one necessarily implies the destruction of the other, and also as a literary device that indicates the pervasive and telling failure of those who 'hear' Jeremiah's words to actually heed or respond appropriately to his message.

Carroll, albeit in a somewhat different way, concurs that there is little value in conceiving of sharp divisions between the concepts of blasphemy and treason in the context of Israel's religious beliefs and self-understanding. According to Carroll, even if blasphemy terminology is not explicitly used, it is implied by the accusation and suggestion of death penalty:

The story does not explain why this should be so, but the reaction of the priests, prophets and people clearly indicates that cursing the temple (vv. 6, 9, 12) or the city (vv. 6.9 [sic], 11, 12, 20) warrants such punishment. This can only be explained on the grounds that an ideology of the sacred site and city existed which made both the property of the deity...So to speak against either was to blaspheme Yahweh of hosts, *the* god of Israel. What justification can there ever be for such blasphemy?<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> O'Connor suggests that the modification "addresses a circumstance of the people where temple theology and practice are not major questions" ("Do Not Trim," 621). However, such an assertion does not account for the emphasis on both temple and city up to this point in the narrative, not to mention Jer. 7:1–15.

<sup>103</sup> Holladay, too, notes the omission of any reference to the temple in v. 11, and suggests that this amounts to more of a political than a cultic focus, yet he offers the following qualification: "But it is only a matter of accent, for the city as a whole was both a political and a cultic center. The effect of the accusation then is to suggest that Jrm is subverting the state and at the same time to suggest that to speak against the city is to blaspheme against Yahweh, who makes his name dwell there; and the punishment for blasphemy is death (Exod 22:27; Lev 24:10-16). It is a perfect instance of the Israelite union of 'secular' and 'religious' perceptions in the image of covenant" (Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 2:107).

<sup>104</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 516.

The misquotations of Jeremiah's words (vv. 4–6) in v. 9 and v. 11 appear to be selective in their re-presentation of the prophetic message. It is doubtful that this dynamic indicates a lack of concern over the precise wording of the temple sermon, or a differentiation in the concerns and priorities of various characters. Although the discrepancies might simply constitute indications of redactional activity, it remains worthwhile to explore whether they may be understood as meaningful in relation to the concerns and dynamics of the narrative as a whole. I suggest that the pervasive misquotation of Jeremiah's words contributes to the characterization of those who are accusing him and reporting the contents of his oracle. In their selective attention to the prophet's words, the priests and prophets repeatedly demonstrate their failure to acknowledge the conditional element inherent in the oracle of vv. 4–6, which in turn suggests a refusal to hear and obey in the way the oracle had envisaged.

#### *Jeremiah's Defense (vv. 12–15)*

That fact that Jeremiah is given an opportunity to defend himself, together with the observation that he addresses the officials and all the people rather than his clerical accusers, lends support to readings that understand the episode to have developed into a formal (if still impromptu) trial. The arrival of the officials appears to have afforded the prophet this opportunity, one which may not have been offered by the priests and the prophets or the crowd of people, and it is not entirely inconceivable to construe the roles of the groups involved as prosecutors, plaintiff, judges and jury. However, together with the arguments presented thus far, which call into question such a reading, it may be observed that Jeremiah's self-defense does not directly address the nature of the accusation, the brief response of the officials in v. 16 (often construed as a verdict) barely addresses the content of Jeremiah's defense and, based upon the conclusion in v. 24, it appears to accomplish very little in terms of preventing continued hostility toward the prophet.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Although Hyatt ("Jeremiah," 1007) claims that, "the dignity and assurance with which Jeremiah replied to his accusers...must account in large part for his winning the support of the princes and many of the people, and for his subsequent release," the narrative itself offers very little indication regarding the extent to which Jeremiah's words affected or persuaded those present in the temple courts.

What is striking about Jeremiah's defense is that he expresses less concern with his own acquittal than with emphasizing the thrust of his original message.<sup>106</sup> The prophet refuses to mount a defense of himself or of his message in the terms that have been established by those who accuse him, suggesting that his own understanding of his prophetic authority and legitimacy does not include the presumption that speaking "in the name of the LORD" (v. 9; cf. v. 16) could not also involve words of apparent treason or blasphemy. In fact, far from trying to minimize the scope of his perceived offense, Jeremiah himself reintroduces both the conditional element of his message (v. 13) as well as the dual emphasis upon the temple and the city (v. 12), and appeals twice to his divine commission to do so as the ultimate justification for his speech (vv. 12, 15), thus reinforcing the sense in which his message might be construed as blasphemous, treasonous, presumptuous prophetic speech.

#### *Recapitulation of the Temple Oracle*

Whereas Jeremiah's oracle in vv. 4–6 is presented as a direct address from YHWH via the prophetic formula כה אמר יהוה, and thus Jeremiah's divine commission is implied, the prophet's defense in vv. 12–15 more explicitly appeals to YHWH's sending (שלח) initiative and involves Jeremiah's own admonition to the people.<sup>107</sup> Although he recognizes that the message has already been heard (v. 12), he takes it upon himself to summarize again the main concern of the message in a manner that recalls an element of the temple sermon in 7:1–15, continues the emphasis on attentive obedience (ושמעו), and reintroduces the conditional element of the initial prophetic address.<sup>108</sup> Thompson remarks, "...true to his prophetic calling he appealed to them to *reform* (lit. 'make good'...) their ways. There was a conditional element which ought not to be forgotten. Only repentance could save them."<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 517.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Miller, *Jeremiah*, 773

<sup>108</sup> While the הטיבו דרכיכם ומעלליכם clause is not featured in vv. 4–6, it has a prominent role in Jer. 7:1–15 (vv. 3, 5). This may contribute to our discussion of the relationship between these chapters, however it is possible to overstate the significance of the terminology, since the thrust of this clause is hardly different from the emphasis on turning from one's evil way (26:3) or hearing and obeying the word(s) of YHWH and his prophets (vv. 4–5).

<sup>109</sup> Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 526. He also remarks, "The principle of conditionality is enunciated in 18:1–12. It was evidently well known and understood, though probably not believed."

By acknowledging that his audience has already heard the words he has delivered (שמעתם), and then immediately exhorting them with the imperative to *hear* (שמעו) in the sense of “listen” or “obey” the voice of YHWH, Jeremiah’s message here highlights once again the principle of prophetic speech whereby an individual or a community might hear the prophetic message without truly *hearing* or responding appropriately.<sup>110</sup> According to Holladay, by putting both temple and city back together in his defense, Jeremiah “...insists that, far from subverting the political order by blaspheming, he is simply carrying out his mission to speak the word from Yahweh.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, although his speech is framed by two implicit claims for his innocence on the basis that he has been sent to speak these words by YHWH (vv. 12b; 15b), in the core of his address the prophet actually refuses to defend himself in the way one might expect, instead continuing to exhort the people to change their course and obey God.<sup>112</sup> Especially noteworthy here is Jeremiah’s disclosure of the rationale that YHWH had revealed to him in the context of commanding him to deliver the message in the temple (v. 3).<sup>113</sup>

Having emphasized that the authority of his message is derived from his having been sent by YHWH, Jeremiah exhorts the people to respond appropriately through a restatement of the central thrust of the oracle (vv. 12–13), exhibiting little concern for his own welfare. He is portrayed as harboring less concern over establishing his prophetic authority or assuring his own safety, and displaying instead a commitment to ensuring that his message would be recognized as legitimate divine revelation, so that the people would respond with the appropriate posture of repentance and obedience. Scalise understands Jeremiah’s expression of deference (הנני

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<sup>110</sup> See esp. v. 5 and the comments on vv. 4–6 and v. 7 above.

<sup>111</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 2:107. He also points out that in v. 12 there is an emphatic subject before the verb indicating YHWH’s initiative, and in v. 15 there is the emphatic “in truth” or “really!” (באמת), both of which contribute further to the emphasis on sending.

<sup>112</sup> It is possible that the contrast between the singular focus on the city in the report of v. 11 and Jeremiah’s own recapitulation of his oracle is intended to emphasize that Jeremiah heeded the warning of v. 2 and has not left out any part of his message, even if his audience has been selective in what they have chosen to hear.

<sup>113</sup> As has been discussed above, this rationale was not included in the prophetic oracle itself (vv. 4–6), probably in order to convey the full rhetorical force of the appeal to the people to repent, as opposed to revealing the extent of divine compassion and potentially thereby inviting complacency.

בידכם) as a formula, rather than an “emotional or rhetorical appeal to the consciences or sympathies of the judges.”<sup>114</sup> Although this expression does indicate an acknowledgement of the court’s authority, Jeremiah also reminds them of the problem of shedding innocent blood (דַם נָקִי, v. 15), which indicates that his recognition of their limited authority is subtly qualified by his recognition of the sovereign divine authority to whom he and his interlocutors ultimately must answer.<sup>115</sup>

There is a sense in which each of the above elements of Jeremiah’s defense are inextricably related, and thus function together to reinforce the central thrust of the prophetic message which is at issue throughout the chapter. Not only is this a restatement of key elements of the original message in the temple (vv. 4–6), but it also functions as a corrective to the omission of any mention of the condition of attentive obedience on the part of Jeremiah’s accusers. Although they either fail or refuse to see the full logic of the oracle which has been proclaimed, the prophet is intent on articulating his message as fully, accurately and persuasively as possible. For Jeremiah, this clearly involves more than merely refraining from holding anything back (v.2); the prophet is portrayed as so invested in the message and its desired effect that he takes the opportunity to stress or reiterate elements that are apparently being missed, ignored, or misunderstood by his audience.

### *Section 3: Invoking Precedent via Prophetic Tradition (vv. 16–24)*

The final section of the narrative is framed by an apparently positive verdict given by the officials (v. 16), and a somewhat obscure reference to Jeremiah being rescued by one Ahikam, son of Shaphan (v. 24). Within this framework two episodes are juxtaposed, apparently functioning as precedents in support of the verdict given in verse 16, as well as contrasting the divergent responses of two kings to prophetic messages analogous to Jeremiah’s (vv. 17–19, 20–23). Thus, taken as a unit, the

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<sup>114</sup> Scalise, in *Jeremiah 26-52*, 25. Scalise cites Gen. 16:6; Josh. 9:25; Jer. 38:5 as similar occurrences and maintains on the basis of these that it is a formal acknowledgement of their authority, rather than a rhetorical ploy.

<sup>115</sup> Holladay (*Jeremiah*, 2:107) cites Jer. 2:34 and 22:17 as other instances of this terminology and comments, “Bloodguilt involves the whole community (Deut 19:10–13), a notion Jrm underlines...”

concluding section of chap. 26 portrays three further groups of characters that exemplify potential responses to Jeremiah and his prophetic word.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the dominant tenor of the final section is suggestive of support for, and defense of Jeremiah, providing a contrast not only with the opposition of the prophets and priests in the immediate context, but also with the prevailing tenor of chaps. 1–25 in which the predominant posture toward Jeremiah’s message and prophetic authority has been negative.

The majority of scholars emphasize how poorly the elements of this final section fit together, such that most would not even group vv. 16–24 as a section, instead noting the seemingly awkward placement of vv. 17–19 and positing various hypotheses with regard to the purpose of the additional material in vv. 20–23 and v. 24 to what is often perceived as the original conclusion to the narrative (v. 16).<sup>117</sup> Yet without denying the likely complexity of the text’s compositional history or somewhat disjointed structure of its present form, it may be suggested that this section represents a fitting conclusion to the narrative of chap. 26, signaling a breakdown in the apparent trial-scene and shifting the focus away from the fate of the Jeremiah and toward the community’s wrestling over the interpretation of, and response to his message. While the frame of vv. 16 and 24 does signal a concern over Jeremiah’s fate, it provides more ambiguity than it does resolution or closure, given that neither the supposed verdict (v. 16) nor the testimony of the elders (vv. 17–19) have prevented Jeremiah from being in need of a sudden rescue by the hand of Ahikam (v. 24).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> While the narrator in vv. 20–23 may be taken as another such voice, added to the officials, the elders, and Ahikam in support of Jeremiah, this is a separate dynamic from that of characters within the narrative world expressing their support of the prophet.

<sup>117</sup> See discussion in McKane, *Jeremiah*, 2:674–675. Cf. Bright and Lundbom, both of whom treat Jer. 26:1–19 and 24 as a section and then subsequently to comment upon vv. 20–23. Carroll (*Jeremiah*, 517–518) insists repeatedly that the narrative ought to end with verse 16, given that the prophet’s authenticity and innocence have by this point been publicly recognized and officially established.

<sup>118</sup> For others who attempt to read these latter sections as integrated into the narrative as a whole, see Allen, *Jeremiah*, 301 and Holladay. Holladay resists conceiving of vv. 20–23 as an appendix, and questions the assumption that the narrator would not cite a parallel account; In contrast esp. to Carroll, he claims that “v 19 leaves the narrative ‘up in the air,’ and v 24 is scarcely a conclusion for v 19” (102); he also notes that “the narrative is likewise held together by ‘hand’ ...” referring to verses 14 and 24 (102).



### *The So-Called 'Verdict' (v. 16)*

In contrast to the hasty accusations leveled against Jeremiah in verses 8b–9 and 11, the officials and the people introduce both restraint and theological nuance into the discussion in verse 16. They do not deny the premise of the accusation, namely that Jeremiah has prophesied against the city (and temple); yet they indicate that doing so does not necessarily warrant the death penalty, especially in the case of a prophetic message that has been given בַּשֵּׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ. Importantly, the priests and the prophets also recognized that Jeremiah had prophesied בַּשֵּׁם יְהוָה (v.9), and yet in their judgment this is why he is deserving of death. Whereas the initial accusations implied that the sanctity of the temple and the city of Jerusalem (and by extension, the authority of their leaders and representatives) placed these entities somehow beyond prophetic critique, the apparent verdict of v. 16 suggests that speaking in the name of YHWH involves a level of authority which makes such critique at least potentially legitimate and acceptable. While this principle is no more than implied in the brief and ambiguous words of the officials and the people, it will be developed in two subsequent 'case studies' that invoke precedents from within the prophetic tradition.<sup>119</sup>

In congruence with what has been suggested thus far, I suggest that it is misleading to think of this verse in terms of a verdict, as if it represents a definitive statement by the obvious authorities at the climax of a straightforward trial scene.<sup>120</sup> Instead, v. 16 may be understood as a response to both the initial accusations of Jeremiah and to the prophet's own self-defense, contributing an additional voice and a distinct perspective in the context of what has become a controversy over the community's response to the prophetic message.<sup>121</sup> The judgment of the officials

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<sup>119</sup> O'Connor ("Do Not Trim," 622) asserts that, "the court scene leaves no question that Jeremiah is a true prophet of Yahweh and that at least some members of the community recognized him to be so." However, this overstates what is merely implied in the verdict and fails to recognize the crucial role played by the subsequent material in vv. 17–23.

<sup>120</sup> Thompson (*Jeremiah*, 526) suggests that Jeremiah's defense convinced the palace officials that he was not a false prophet or a blasphemer, that he had spoken in the name of the LORD, and this explains why they deliver their verdict in opposition to the religious leaders.

<sup>121</sup> This is not to deny that the officials possess some measure of authority in the community and in these deliberations, a matter which has been observed (above); it is merely to point out that the dynamics of the narrative make it clear that they are not given the final say or authority, but rather represent one voice which is contributed to the larger process of discernment among various authority figures.

involves both a negation of the accusation against Jeremiah and a positive rationale for their judgment, using the same terminology found in both the direct accusation of the priests, the prophets and all the people (i.e. speaking בַּשֵּׁם־יְהוָה, v. 9), and the indirect testimony of the priests and the prophets, claiming that Jeremiah's treasonous speech is obviously deserving of capital punishment (מִשְׁפַּט־מוֹת, v.11). Yet this is not a verdict so much as it is an appeal to the broader theological concerns addressed by the narrative, namely the reception and discernment of prophetic critique within the community.

While at the level of the narrative action it might seem as though the officials are responding solely to the accusation of v. 11, the account has ultimately been shaped in such a way that the officials' pronouncement in v. 16 responds to the entire complex of concerns raised in vv. 7–11, including blasphemy and treason, the confrontation between prophecy and tradition, and what it might mean to speak in the name of the LORD.<sup>122</sup> While the officials do not explicitly address such issues, their utilization of the terms that have been used in the accusation of Jeremiah suggest that they are calling into question the premises of the argument for Jeremiah's culpability, not merely the conclusion that he deserves to die.

### *Two Case-Studies/Precedents (vv. 17–23)*

Verse 17 introduces yet another set of characters into the episode, namely representatives of a group of local elders (אַנְשֵׁים מִזִּקְנֵי הָאָרֶץ), who also appear to have some measure of authority by virtue of their inclusion in the deliberations.<sup>123</sup> They stand and contribute yet another perspective to the deliberations by recounting and interpreting a precedent established within the prophetic tradition. It is unclear whether they should be understood to cite two different accounts of prophetic critique and royal response or merely one case involving the prophet Micah (vv. 18–19), to

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<sup>122</sup> Although v. 16 involves a relatively simple grammatical negation, the role of the officials in the conflict cannot be reduced to *merely* a negation of the accusation leveled by the priests and prophets in v. 11. Despite their brevity, the words they use reveal something crucial about their own understanding of what is at stake and how their authority functions within the community. The officials claim that Jeremiah has spoken “to us” (אֵלֵינוּ), “in the name of the LORD, *our God*” (בַּשֵּׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ), including themselves in the group that constitutes the direct object of that speaking.

<sup>123</sup> This construction is far less common than “elders of the people” and “elders of Israel.” As a result, it is difficult to be sure what kind of authority these figures may have had in the community relative to the officials, the priests and prophets, and the crowd of people. See Scalise, in *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 27 and Holladay *Jeremiah*, 2:107-108 for more on these figures.

which the narrator or a tradent has added the episode involving Uriah (vv. 20–23). The two precedents are striking in their parallelism. Each narrates an episode involving a prophet whose message of judgment against the city as well as the temple and/or land is explicitly or implicitly likened to that of Jeremiah.<sup>124</sup> In each case, there is conveyed a sense of the potential mortal threat that the prophet faces due to the conflict between the prophetic word and other authority figures, as in Jeremiah’s own case.<sup>125</sup> Finally, both scenarios take up key terms that have been central to the trial-like deliberations in chap. 26 thus far, namely the notion of YHWH relenting (נָחַם) concerning judgment/disaster (רָעָה) in the case of Micah (cf. v. 13), and the concept of prophesying “in the name of the LORD” (בִּשְׁם יְהוָה) in the case of Uriah (cf. vv. 9, 16).

Together these features might reasonably be taken to suggest that the same group is here portrayed as setting forth two cases that each illustrate an analogy to the matter at hand, in hopes of shedding further light on what ought to be done in Jeremiah’s case. Yet, a number of factors call into question the extent of the elders’ speech and may suggest that a different voice has been introduced at vv. 20ff. For example, Scalise notes the different verbal forms of נָבֵא employed in vv. 18 and 20, as well as various structural elements present vv. 18–19 that are absent in vv. 20–23.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> While in v. 20 Uriah’s words are explicitly likened to those of Jeremiah (כָּכָה דִּבְרֵי יִרְמְיָהוּ), there is little doubt that the same dynamic of parallelism is articulated, albeit more implicitly, by the citation of Micah’s threat against Zion, Jerusalem, and הַר הַבַּיִת in v. 18.

<sup>125</sup> It is worth noting that whereas Micah and Uriah are portrayed explicitly as under potential mortal threat from the hand of a particular king, the death threats leveled at Jeremiah are more implicitly associated with the presence and agency of Jehoiakim, which ‘haunts’ the narrative of chap. 26.

<sup>126</sup> Scalise (in *Jeremiah* 26–52, 29–30) notes the lack of oracular citation, the lack of warnings or rhetorical questions, and a different way of indicating the prophet’s hometown/origin as indications that the case of Uriah is likely not also set in the voice of the elders. Both uses of the verb are participles, but the former is in *niphal* form (נִבְּאָה) while the latter is in the *hithpael* (מִתְנַבְּא). Scalise does not discuss the significance of the second instance of the same root in v. 20b, the imperfect *niphal waw-consecutive* (וַיִּנְבֵּא) indicating the parallel between the words of Uriah and those of Jeremiah. While the forms remain slightly different, there may be a greater sense of continuity than Scalise allows when it comes to the two portrayals of prophetic speech. In v. 17, Micah’s proper name is modified by the adjectival המורשתי, while in v. 20 Kiriath-Jearim is indicated by a prepositional phrase. In addition, she notes that the early chronology indicated by Jer. 26:1 may suggest that the case of Uriah is an event subsequent to the main narrative action of chap. 26, later on in Jehoiakim’s reign. Holladay leans toward interpreting vv. 20–23 as the narrator’s contribution, because, “v 19 leaves the narrative ‘up in the air,’ and v 24 is scarcely a conclusion for v 19.” By no means is this taken to detract from the parallelism of the accounts: “It would appear that Micah is parallel to Jrm in a previous generation and that Uriah

However, the significance of such distinctions may be overstated given that, for example, both the *niphal* and *hithpael* participial forms of נִבֵּה, in combination with a form of the verb הָיָה may be rendered in the same way, as “used to prophesy.”<sup>127</sup>

Although analysis of structure and syntax appear to yield inconclusive results as to the question of the extent of the elders’ speech, consideration of the dynamics of the narrative suggest that construing vv. 20–24 together as a narrated conclusion to the chapter represents the most plausible approach.<sup>128</sup>

#### *The Elders’ Speech (vv. 17–19)*

The way in which the elders’ speech follows on the heels of what might otherwise be understood as a climactic, perhaps even conclusive, verdict (v. 16) is one of the key indications that the narrative is not best understood as a straightforward account of a trial.<sup>129</sup> If the account concerning Micah is to be understood as a contribution to the legal proceedings, along the lines of further evidence being brought forward or an

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is parallel to Jrm in his own generation; the narrative of Uriah is thus integrated into the larger narrative” (102).

<sup>127</sup> See Joüon-Muraoka, §121 *f*, for the *niphal* use in v. 18. Holladay (*Jeremiah* 2:102) argues that, “...the diction of v 20a is like that of v 18a (הָיָה plus a participle from a stem of נִבֵּה) and v 21 is parallel to v 19 (the subject is the king; ‘put to death’ [מֵוֹת hip’il ]; ‘fear’).” In addition, he wonders if there is an intended distinction that is not usually noticed in the undifferentiated translations. According to him, “The hitpa’el stem of this verb is used by Jrm of the false prophets (14:14; 23:13), but here it is used of someone whose message is similar to Jrm’s. It is used in a derogatory fashion by Shemaiah about Jrm’s message...Clearly, then, the verb implies nothing about the content of the message, but is concerned rather with the form in which it is presented” (109). Although Holladay does not conclude that vv. 20–23 should be understood as a continuation of the elders speech, his point serves as a caution against drawing firm conclusions based on ambiguous evidence.

<sup>128</sup> While there is no clear textual indication that the elders have ceased speaking, the nature of the two precedents and the ways in which they are cited are illuminating in relation to one another. Whereas the Micah account involves an apparent citation from an extant prophetic collection and a set of rhetorical questions, both of which suggest an appeal to an event or tradition that is known by the audience, the Uriah account reads more like a report of a lesser-known event, intended to correspond by analogy with both the elders’ speech and the present narrative as a whole. Moreover, the elders appear to conclude their speech in vv. 19 with the statement וְאִנְחָנוּ עֲשִׂים רָעָה גְדוֹלָה עַל־נַפְשׁוֹתֵינוּ, while no such parallel conclusion follows vv. 20–23; in its place is the concluding remark of v. 24, which is clearly set in the narrator’s voice and connected to the preceding material by the conjunction אַךְ.

<sup>129</sup> According to Holladay, “One must either conclude that the narrator wished to place the case of Micah and Uriah side by side...and thus gave the material out of logical order, or else that the order of events is correct and the speech of the elders is in the nature of confirmation of the verdict” (*Jeremiah* 2:102). In contrast, I suggest that neither of these alternatives is adequate and that the dilemma only exists if one assumes it is a proper trial.

analogous case being cited as precedent for the verdict that is desired, then one would expect such deliberations to take place prior to the verdict of the officials. Given the seemingly awkward placement of this address, it is preferable to understand it as illustrating a prominent set of voices in the community that seeks to contribute another perspective to the process of discernment and interpretation that is taking place, rather than a contribution from formal witnesses during a trial.<sup>130</sup>

The unique phenomenon of the citation of another canonical prophet in these verses has provoked considerable interest, often in terms of the potential insights it might yield with regard to the development of prophetic traditions and the process of canonization, no less than in terms of how it might function within the context of Jer. 26.<sup>131</sup> Micah's oracle, like Jeremiah's, is addressed to all the people of Judah and involves direct threats against both the city and the temple (הר הבית).<sup>132</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, the quotation in v. 18b is the only place in the narrative of Jer. 26 in which the proper name Jerusalem is mentioned; elsewhere it is referred to as העיר הזאת (vv. 6, 9, 11, 12, 15, 20).<sup>133</sup> Similarly, the somewhat ambiguous phrase used to refer to the temple in the Micah citation (הר הבית) differs from the ways in which it is denoted throughout the rest of the account (בית-יהוה in vv. 2, 10; הבית הזה in vv. 6, 9, 12). Finally, the proper name צִיּוֹן is introduced for the first time in the narrative, here in conjunction with the city and the temple which occupy a central place in Jeremiah's own prophetic

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<sup>130</sup> Epp-Tiessen, *Concerning the Prophets*, 153-157; cf. 44) locates chapter 26 at the center of an elaborate concentric structure that he finds in Jer. 23:9-29:32, and sees vv. 17-19 as the center of chap. 26, thus making these three verses the structural and conceptual lynchpin for his interpretation. Despite significant reservations about the plausibility and interpretative value of his structural argument, I acknowledge that there are resonances between his interpretation of the coherence and message of 26:1-24 and the approach pursued in the present study.

<sup>131</sup> See Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*, 128, 197, 212, 237. Seitz suggest that this kind of explicit reference not only appropriates the specifically cited passage into the context of the book which does the quoting, but also draws the attention of the audience of the latter to the other prophetic collection as a whole. Seitz attaches a lot of importance to Micah 3:12 as the exact middle point of the book of the twelve (see esp. 128, 237) cf. Clements, "Prophecy Interpreted."

<sup>132</sup> Literally, "the mountain of the house." There is some difficulty in determining what is intended here. Although the case of metonymy in 26:2 (כל־ערי יהודה) is not employed here, there is a parallel dynamic whereby a single prophetic oracle is portrayed as addressing the entire nation comprehensively.

<sup>133</sup> This is one of 5 places in OT (also Esth. 2:6; 1 Chr.3:5; 2Chr. 25:1; 32:9) in which the perpetual *Kethiv*/*Qere* of the name of the city includes the *yod*. According to Joüon-Muraoka, the *Qere* is most likely ירושלים, as it is spelled out here, although in most instances the *Kethiv* does not include the *yod* (72-73).

message. In Micah's prophecy, the fate of all three entities is expressed in apparently straightforward, unconditional threats evoking barrenness and destruction.<sup>134</sup> Thus, while analogous to Jeremiah's oracle in a number of ways, there are indications that the prophecy of Micah is to be understood as even more drastic in its potentially blasphemous and treasonous implications.<sup>135</sup> In contrast to the selective hearing and reporting of Jeremiah's accusers, the elders demonstrate by their citation that they understand quite well what is at stake.

Although the citation does not explicitly use conditional language, the elders' interpretation of it in their account of Hezekiah's response clearly indicates that the oracle was understood as such, since the performance of actions which may be construed as repentance and attentive obedience did lead to a divine relenting and an averting of disaster.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, this responsive divine action *does* correspond precisely to the terminology of YHWH's relenting (נחם) from carrying out promised disaster (רעה), employed in the conditional language that was introduced v. 3 and then echoed in Jeremiah's exhortation in v. 13.<sup>137</sup> Thus, the elders' speech may be understood as a reference to a paradigmatic case in which a prophetic message of judgment was understood as conditional despite its severe and apparently unconditional language. It functions not only as an analogue to Jeremiah's oracle, but also as a precedent that illustrates the appropriate response to such a message, as attentive obedience to the prophetic word issues in a form of repentance and a consequent avoidance of judgment.

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<sup>134</sup> On Zion being plowed (as) a field, and the use of the niph'al form of חרש: this is a case of a doubly transitive verb being used passively, so the second object of the verb (Zion is the first, field is the second) remains in the accusative (Joüon-Muraoka §128 c).

<sup>135</sup> It is probably worth noting here that Micah 3, like Jer. 7 and 26, is frequently understood as a prophetic expression of opposition to the inviolability doctrine of the Zion tradition.

<sup>136</sup> The dual rhetorical interrogative, הלא ירא את־יהוה ויחל את־פני יהוה, employs terminology that is no doubt unique in the context of chapter 26, yet the message is closely analogous to the central concerns which have been observed throughout. While there is admittedly no precise correspondence of language in the description of Hezekiah's response, the concepts of fearing (ירא) and seeking the favour (ויחל את־פני) of YHWH may be understood as roughly corresponding to the concepts of hearing/heeding, repenting, and amending of one's ways (cf. vv. 3; 4–6; 13; compare 2 Kgs. 13:4).

<sup>137</sup> Additionally, the foreboding comment that closes the elders' speech maintains the link established in v. 3 between human rebellion (רעה) and divine judgment (רעה), implying that the present course of action stands in stark contrast with the exemplary conduct of Hezekiah and all Judah in Micah's day (v. 19).

Robert Carroll's reading of this phenomenon could hardly be more different from that presented immediately above. He argues that the citation of Micah 3:12 in Jer. 26 amounts to an imaginative reinterpretation whereby a favorable public response to Micah's preaching is contrived in order to avoid the conclusion that he was a false prophet based on the logic of Deut. 18:21–22.<sup>138</sup> He contends that Micah's own prophetic message was obviously "faulty," given that the thrust of its prediction, namely the destruction of Jerusalem, is proven to have been mistaken by the very fact that it is subsequently cited by Jeremiah in that same city, and given that the dynamics of repentance and conditionality are absent from the explicit content of Micah's oracle.<sup>139</sup> On the basis of these premises, Carroll argues that Micah's prophecy has been reshaped in the context of Jeremiah by the addition of a conditional message of repentance in a way that "rescue[s] Micah from the charge of being a false prophet," and also fits with the way that the "conditional element" has been applied to Jeremiah's own prophetic ministry, via subsequent interpolation, throughout the book in order to provide a rationalizing account for the failure of Jeremiah's own message.<sup>140</sup>

However, Carroll's argument remains unconvincing for the following reasons: First, he appears to presuppose an account of prophetic speech here that is reduced to a narrowly predictive enterprise, so that the categories of success or failure are determined by the correspondence (or lack thereof) between a given prophetic oracle and what actually takes place.<sup>141</sup> In contrast, the present study has consistently maintained that Jeremiah's temple sermon may be understood, in accordance with the divinely revealed rationale of v. 3, as prophetic speech that seeks to move its audience to repentance and attentive obedience.<sup>142</sup> Second, Carroll seems unwilling to recognize

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<sup>138</sup> Carroll, "Prophecy, Dissonance," 381-391.

<sup>139</sup> Carroll, "Prophecy, Dissonance," 388.

<sup>140</sup> Carroll, "Prophecy, Dissonance," 388, 389-390.

<sup>141</sup> Although Carroll offers a more extended and nuance account of the nature of prophecy in biblical literature in his 1979 book, *When Prophecy Failed*, it remains the case that he frequently assumes a relatively narrow concept of prophecy as prediction.

<sup>142</sup> Contrast, for example, Moberly's claim that "The fascinating use of this passage [i.e. Mic. 3:9–12] in Jer. 26:17–19 illustrates, among other things, the intrinsically response-seeking and contingent nature of prophecy as articulated in [Jer.] 18:7–10" (*Prophecy and Discernment*, 62, n. 55). Cf. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology*, 196-197. As noted above, Moberly construes prophecy as a form of speech on behalf of God which is aimed at repentance as an ideal, so that even where negative predictions in the form of threatening language are used, the 'failure' of the threat-prediction(s) to take place would actually constitute the 'success' of the prophetic

the possibility that a conditional dynamic might be present even where explicitly conditional language is not; yet it is precisely this possibility that is suggested by the notion that the overt revelation of God's desire to relent in response to human repentance has the potential to diminish the rhetorical and existential force of a proclamation of judgment.<sup>143</sup> In places, it seems that Carroll almost allows himself to consider a more nuanced account of biblical prophecy and its relational dynamics, as in his brief acknowledgement of the possibility that conditionality might be an element inherent to prophetic discourse. Ultimately, however, his commitment here to a problematically narrow understanding of prophecy as a matter of prediction and fulfillment (or lack thereof), along with his hypothetical account of later conditional interpolations functioning merely as rationalizations of unfulfilled predictions, leads him to foreclose on the possibility that prophetic preaching might actually be an inherently conditional form of address which necessarily implies both the possibility of repentance and therefore also the possibility of its success being manifest precisely in the failure of its ominous predictions to actually be carried out.

#### *The Case of Uriah and Jehoiakim (vv. 20–23)*

In contrast to Micah, the prophet named in the subsequent account is not well-known either in historical or canonical terms.<sup>144</sup> The episode involving Uriah picks up on the motif of prophetic speech being proclaimed בִּשְׁם יְהוָה, a category that has been understood as a central issue by multiple sets of characters already, and suggesting a

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message. See also Moberly's excursuses (*Prophecy & Discernment*, 2006), in which he engages with Carroll directly on the interpretation of the book of Jeremiah, though with a slightly different focus.

<sup>143</sup> Carroll sets up an either/or paradigm which he sees as a clear indication of the validity of his own line of reasoning: "Either the editors of Jeremiah understood all prophetic preaching to be essentially conditional, hence the call to repentance was implicit wherever it was not explicit. Or they are here attempting to deal with the problem of Micah's unfulfilled prediction..." ("Prophecy, Dissonance," 388). However, he fails to offer any argument for why the first of his two contrasting possibilities is not acceptable, besides his pervasive assumption that any conditional element must be a later redactional interpolation.

<sup>144</sup> Uriah is introduced as the son of Shemaiah, and although this latter name is also attested in Jer. 29:24 and 36:12, there is no way of knowing if the same individual is envisioned each time, nor is there any other mention of the name Uriah with which to compare. If the prophet in this episode is not well-known in the tradition, his monarchic counterpart certainly is (cf. Jer. 22).



close congruence with the words of Jeremiah.<sup>145</sup> In addition, it contributes to the pervasive tension between temple and land throughout the narrative, indicating a close affinity between the words of Jeremiah and Uriah, and yet characterizing the latter as speaking against city and land while the prophetic critique of the former has been portrayed as focused on the city and temple.<sup>146</sup> The situation becomes complicated further when vv. 17–19 are compared with vv. 20–23, the former involving prophetic speech against temple, city, and Zion, and the latter involving prophecy against only the land and the city.

However, as has been suggested above, the concerns of treason and blasphemy may be understood as closely linked within the theological perspective of the people of Judah. Within the historical context envisioned by the text, it is hard to imagine a scenario in which the destruction of the city would not also entail the destruction of the temple. Without weakening the above argument regarding the absence of a sacred/secular dichotomy in the distinctions between various authority figures of the community, it may be observed that throughout the narrative of chap. 26 situations in which king Jehoiakim and/or his officials are in view tend to operate with a more political emphasis (city, land) which drops out the cultic emphasis on the temple. This may be understood as indicative not of a lack of religious or theological concern, but of the persistent failure/refusal to hear the prophetic word, which is exhibited at different levels among each set of characters, and which will come to climactic expression in Jehoiakim's own actions in chapter 36. Again, it should be emphasized that such a

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<sup>145</sup> The priests, prophets and all the people (v. 9) and the officials (v. 16) have all appealed to this feature, but with different conclusions, apparently suggesting different notions of the feature's significance.

<sup>146</sup> The reference to both the city and the land is closely connected to the references to Jerusalem and Zion in Micah's oracle (cf. v. 18), but at variance with the emphasis on the duality of city and temple that has been operative in the chapter thus far. The absence of *על־העיר הזאת* in v. 20 in the OG version typically prompts interpreters to choose between the two possible explanations put forth by Janzen (*Studies in the Text*, 21), namely the theory that MT represents a conflation of variants (i.e. positing *על־העיר הזאת* and *על־הארץ הזאת* as variants joined by *waw* instead of choosing between them) or the theory that the LXX reflects a case of haplography within its Hebrew *Vorlage*. According to Janzen, a conflation of textual variants is more probable than haplography in v. 21 as well, where the MT has "officials and mighty men" and the LXX mentions only the officials. Cf. McKane, *Jeremiah* 2:660, and Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:101.

posture stems not from a lack of concern over the realm of the sacred but from a refusal to respond in the way(s) envisaged by prophetic critique within the religious tradition.

The relationship between these two prophetic precedents is complex, as they each provide clear analogies with the situation of Jeremiah, and yet also seem to be intentionally juxtaposed with each other.<sup>147</sup> Without ignoring or attempting to smooth over the complicated questions of the relationship between each section, and without downplaying the various text-critical difficulties in these verses, it may be observed that in their present form the cases of Micah and Uriah function as parallel accounts, fit coherently within the narrative of chapter 26, and contribute to the central message of the chapter which urges a particular form of obedient response to the authoritative prophetic word. Although it may not be possible to establish precisely who is speaking in the latter of the two cases, or at what stage in the process of composition and redaction each element was incorporated into the larger narrative, what is clear is that the two episodes taken together parallel each other in significant ways and also provide analogies to the current situation Jeremiah finds himself in, particularly as they constitute examples of apparently legitimate prophetic speech directed against the city and the temple/land “in the name of YHWH.”<sup>148</sup> Moreover, the episodes serve to further emphasize what is at stake in the interpretative crisis of the community, highlighting the implications of two alternative responses by the kings Hezekiah and Jehoiakim, respectively, and presenting a balanced portrayal of the two options the community is faced with in their current interpretative conflict over the legitimacy of Jeremiah’s message.

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<sup>147</sup> Holladay (*Jeremiah* 2:109) explains, “Though one’s first impression is that the narrative of Uriah is intended as a counterfoil to that of Jrm (and v 24 confirms that impression), the phraseological parallels of the Uriah narrative are with the references to Micah immediately preceding.” The parallels he notes are the terminology related to putting the prophet to death in vv. 19, 21, the parallel between fearing God and being afraid of the king, and the constructions that speak of prophetic activity in vv. 18 and 20.

<sup>148</sup> Again, although the case of Micah is not as explicit as that of Uriah, the account of Hezekiah’s response, conveyed in terms of fearing YHWH and seeking the favor of YHWH, clearly indicates that the king regarded Micah as prophesying in the name of YHWH.

The narrative episode concludes with Jeremiah being protected by Ahikam, son of Shaphan, but it is often remarked that it is difficult to see why this is necessary in the context.<sup>149</sup> According to the *trial-scene* interpretation, it would seem that the case has already been found in Jeremiah's favor in v. 16, and the tenor of vv. 17–23 suggests further reasons that the community would have for upholding the officials' 'verdict' and recognizing Jeremiah's innocence, if not also his authority as a prophet. However, if the narrative as a whole is *not* read as a straightforward trial scene with a clear resolution, but rather as a conflict of interpretation featuring various perspectives and possible responses to the prophetic message of Jeremiah, then perhaps the unexpected need for his rescue is not so incomprehensible.

First, it is noteworthy that although Jehoiakim is not mentioned as an agent directly involved in the conflict over Jeremiah's sermon, the superscription and the presence of the officials "from the king's house" (v. 10) suggest that the presence of this particular king is constantly in the background of the narrative.<sup>150</sup> In contrast to these more 'innocent' features that are suggestive of the action occurring in the context of Jehoiakim's reign, the account of the fate of Uriah contributes to the more explicitly negative and menacing portrayal of the king throughout the book (cf. Jer. 22:13–19; 36:1–32), and highlights the threat he poses to Jeremiah in the immediate context. Thus, the case of Uriah not only functions as a parallel account to that of Micah, but also functions in contrast with v. 24, underscoring the fact that, unlike his contemporary prophetic counterpart, Jeremiah crucially has a supporter in this case who is able to

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<sup>149</sup> Thompson notes that Shaphan was a scribe during Josiah's reform and that Jeremiah seems to have had good relations with his family (cf. 2 Kgs. 22:3–14), explaining, "The support of such a family saved Jeremiah's life. The friendly relations which existed between them and Jeremiah suggest that Jeremiah had a positive and sympathetic attitude to Josiah's reform and to his general policy" (*Jeremiah*, 528); Ahikam's son is Gedaliah who is prominent in 39–40. Holladay comments: "The impression with which one is left, then, is that Ahikam, though not part of the king's group of advisors, was a person of standing and influence" (Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2:110). See also Wilcoxon, "Political Background," for a construal of the political context of the accounts of Jeremiah's temple sermon.

<sup>150</sup> See Carroll's intriguing discussion of the absence of Jehoiakim and the brief discussion above.

save him before the king could hear about what is going on and make his presence known more explicitly.

Second, I have argued that the breakdown in what one might expect of a formal trial scene, together with the ambiguous and shifting roles of various characters in the narrative, contribute to a sense of uncertainty with regard to Jeremiah's fate. The prophet himself is portrayed as recognizing this, as during his opportunity to articulate a defense of his actions and of his message he defers to the authority of those around him by making two comments which exhibit a sense of foreboding (vv. 14–15).<sup>151</sup> Although he is confident that he has been sent by YHWH and that his message demands responsive obedience rather than a debate over whether to kill him or not, Jeremiah recognizes that he has no way of proving such things other than his own testimony and a reiteration of the message itself. Given his realistic acknowledgement that the situation is out of his own control and in the hands of those around him (הַנְּגִי בִידְכֶם, v. 14), it is fitting that in the final scene his deliverance would come by the hand of a supporter (יָד אֲחִיקָם), so as to avoid his being finally given over into the more antagonistic – or at least easily swayed – hand of the crowd (בִּידֵי־הָעָם) (v. 24).<sup>152</sup>

Finally, it may be recognized that, despite the admittedly positive feature of the rescue of Jeremiah taking place before innocent blood could be shed, the conclusion of the account by no means provides resolution relative to the central concerns of the narrative. The very fact that Jeremiah was still in need of rescuing confirms the central problem envisaged by the narrative, namely that the entire community is so preoccupied with the threat of treason and blasphemy, the nature of prophetic legitimacy, and the debate over whether or not to kill the prophet that no one truly listens to or responds to the message itself. The conditions of repentance and obedience so central to Jeremiah's oracle and subsequent exhortation remain absent even in the more favorable responses of the officials and the elders, indicating that by no means does the survival of the prophet himself constitute the success of his ministry, and that

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<sup>151</sup> In v. 14: הַנְּגִי בִידְכֶם; in v. 15: כִּי־דָם נָקִי אַתֶּם נֹתְנִים עֲלֵיכֶם.

<sup>152</sup> Likewise, noting the same terminological parallels, Holladay comments, "This last verse serves then in several ways to round off the chapter" (*Jeremiah*, 2:110).

the likelihood of further conflict over his difficult message of repentance is foreshadowed.

### *Hearing and Handling*

It is striking that a narrative dealing with the contested authority of the prophet and his message in the context of other religious authorities, and with the failure of that prophetic message to achieve the desired response of attentive obedience on the part of its audience, would involve such a high concentration of suggestive and idiomatic terminology related to hearing and handling the prophet and the word of YHWH. Faced with a prophetic oracle which seems to threaten the very foundations of their religious tradition, the people and the cultic authority figures seize the prophet, grasping for control over the volatile situation. Although the prophet may be subject to the grip of the crowd, and without intervention would finally have been handed over to their devices, it becomes clear that the message itself cannot be handled in this way.

Not to be held back by the prophet, nor silenced by those who seek to extinguish the voice which delivers it, the message is sent with the full authority of YHWH and demands nothing less than full attention and obedient response. Although many of the people involved hear, 'with their ears' quite literally, the call for the people to truly *hear*, to listen and obey in response to the voice of the Lord, is in vain. Thus, the conclusion of chap. 26 suggests that the people of Judah and their leaders remain bent on managing and controlling their own fate at all costs, rather than submitting to the authority of the word(s) of God as mediated through the prophetic tradition. Although Jeremiah himself has survived this particular conflict, there is little doubt that his authority and his fate will remain contested and that the peoples' resistance to the word of the Lord will continue to provoke the threat of divine judgment.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have argued that Jer. 26:1–24 may be understood both as a coherent narrative account, in which an apparent trial scene deconstructs, and as an interpretation of Jer. 7:1–15 that confirms and elaborates upon the inherently conditional dynamic of Jeremiah's temple sermon. In this recapitulation and narrative

contextualization of the sermon that was portrayed in chap. 7 (vv. 1–6), there is an immediate and negative reaction on the part of those who hear it (vv. 7–9). As the scene develops, the portrayal shifts away from the impulsive hostility of a threatening mob and toward a process of deliberation in which a more formal case is made against Jeremiah (vv. 10–11), the prophet is allowed to mount a defense (vv. 12–15), and both civic officials and community elders offer assessments which indicate Jeremiah's innocence (vv. 16–23). Yet, despite overt indications that the opposition to the prophet's message might develop into a formal trial scene, the movement toward legal formality is neither decisive nor complete. Instead, elements of tension and ambiguity throughout the narrative prevent a reading of the account as a straightforward trial scene just as the elements of developing formality complicate the initial depiction of a hostile mob. It may even be that what interpreters frequently regard as an inexplicably awkward conclusion (v. 24) actually functions to retain a sense in which, despite the appearance of some level of formality and substantial support for Jeremiah, the threat of the hostile mob constitutes an undertone that is never entirely absent from the narrative.

The narrative contours of Jer. 26 include processes and motifs that are indicative of a trial scene, and yet ultimately this literary model is overwhelmed and subverted, suggesting the inadequacy of legal argument for discerning the authority and legitimacy of prophetic discourse. While resisting a straightforward legal model as an interpretative framework, I have also challenged construals that take the apparent elements of tension and inconcinnity to be extensive enough so as to preclude any possibility of a coherent interpretation of the chapter as a whole; by contrast, I maintain that the literary and conceptual tensions within the text may be understood as meaningful within the context of its canonical form, even if their presence might be due, in part, to the intricate contingencies of compositional development. In this regard, my reading of Jer. 26 both continues and develops my earlier critiques of both the inviolability hypothesis and understandings of the conditional dynamic as a mere redactional perspective, added to and juxtaposed with a putative full-doom ideology. Given that the conclusion to chapter four dealt primarily with the question of apparent conflict between diverse theologies of divine presence, the remainder of this conclusion

will focus especially upon the dynamics of coherence and redaction in explicitly theological perspective.

In the conclusion to the previous chapter, I suggested that the Christian tradition of theological discourse may be understood to offer significant interpretative resources for a theologically-oriented reading of Jeremiah's temple sermon. Likewise, the present discussion may be drawn to a close by signaling the dialectical relationship between past and present in the construction of meaning, and suggesting again that meaningful theological categories, derived from and operative within the Christian tradition, might suggest a plausible alternative to some of the dominant categories that are sometimes employed in an effort to make sense of this text. In the light of my reading of Jer. 7:1–15 as a prophetic expression of the conditional alternatives of promise and threat to continued divine presence, I have argued that 26:1–24 may be understood to interpret and affirm the message of its intratextual counterpart by portraying both legitimate and illegitimate ways of understanding and responding to Jeremiah's message of conditional judgment. That is, Jer. 26 may be understood to provide an authoritative hermeneutical guide, from within the developing Jeremianic tradition itself, for understanding the prophetic discourse reflected in both Jer. 7:1–15 and Mic. 3:12. In the midst of various possible postures toward the prophet and his message, from overt hostility and refusal to hear to misconstruals that diminish or disregard the relational, contingent dynamic of its language, the narrative of chap. 26 highlights the inherently conditional nature of the prophetic word, as well as the divine rationale behind it. Within the context of the contemporary interpretation of this text, one is likewise faced with numerous possibilities. In contrast to reductive accounts of the conditional dynamic as one ideological perspective among others, perhaps with an underlying socio-political motivation (Sharp), or as an exercise in 'saving face' in the wake of failed predictions and cognitive dissonance (Carroll), I maintain that theological categories such as divine compassion and human repentance, as well as the implications that these realities have in relation to the concepts of divine and human freedom, comprise a viable hermeneutical alternative.

The conditional dynamic and the nature of biblical prophetic speech is central to David J. Reimer's 2003 essay "An Overlooked Term in Old Testament Theology–

Perhaps.”<sup>153</sup> In a way that is closely related to the interdisciplinary form of theological interpretation advocated in the present study, Reimer seeks to foster a conversation between biblical texts that use the term אולי (perhaps) and theological discourse related to God’s freedom and human action. He argues that conditionality and contingency are inherent to the very notion of covenant, and thus central to the biblical portrayal of divine-human relationship.<sup>154</sup> Yet, the traditional theological importance attached to the notion that God must be faithful and trustworthy as opposed to fickle or capricious demands both close theological attention to the dynamics of divine sovereignty in relation to divine and human freedom, as well as close exegetical attention to those texts that seem to suggest that God might change, or change his mind. It is Reimer’s contention that texts employing אולי terminology play a helpful role in the discussion. In a key part of his essay, Reimer focuses in on the three accounts in the Hebrew Bible in which God himself uses the term (Jer. 26:3; 36:3; Ezek. 12:3), each of which seems to recognize a measure of human freedom, and thus the possibility that people may or may not act in accordance with God’s hoped-for response. He explains,

In all three cases, the prophet, receiving a word from Yahweh, is instructed to convey a message which Yahweh hopes – it cannot be stated more strongly than that – will have an intended effect on his people. The instance of the ‘temple sermon’ in Jer. 26 is especially noteworthy, as אולי introduces initially the hoped-for human response, but then in turn the divine action that might be predicated upon it.<sup>155</sup>

Importantly, Reimer’s reading does not minimize the tension between conditional and unconditional elements, as he explains, “The difficulty lies in the tension between an unconditional announcement of punishment, and the hope held open by a ‘perhaps’ spoken by God.”<sup>156</sup> What sets him apart from some of the more dominant critical approaches to this dynamic is that he is willing to entertain the possibility that theological categories might offer appropriate and valuable resources for doing interpretative justice to the tension.<sup>157</sup> According to Reimer, “it seems from

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<sup>153</sup> Reimer, “An Overlooked Term,” 325-346.

<sup>154</sup> Reimer, “An Overlooked Term,” 325.

<sup>155</sup> Reimer, “An Overlooked Term,” 339, with reference to 26:3 in the RSV.

<sup>156</sup> Reimer, “An Overlooked Term,” 340.

<sup>157</sup> Another interpreter who articulates a critical and theologically-oriented account of Jer. 26 as communicating an inherently conditional message of judgment is Patrick D. Miller, who explains, “Just as the oracles of Jeremiah have conjoined calls to repentances (*sic*) with announcements of judgment that is going to happen, so also that tension is summarized in these



such texts that God and people regard each other as free from constraint. In spite of known qualities, past experience, or even direct reassurance, the relationship of God and people is marked by indecisiveness or, stated positively, openness and possibility.”<sup>158</sup> Without denying the likelihood of compositional depth and complexity, such an account suggests that complex hypotheses about putative ideological layers in the text, even if they may be reasonable conjectures from a certain perspective, might be ultimately unnecessary as explanations of a phenomenon that may be plausibly accounted for on other terms.

It might be countered that the theologically-oriented approaches represented by Reimer (here) and Moberly (see above) simply neglect the so-called “depth-dimension” of the biblical text’s composition history, minimizing the significance of redaction-critical hypotheses regarding the nature of conditional language in order to support a preference for synchronic readings and theological conclusions. However, proposing an alternative construal for understanding the conditional dynamic of prophecy does not necessarily depend on ignoring or denying the complex history of the text’s development; rather, based upon a particular, theological understanding of the nature and purpose of prophetic language, within a theological tradition which regards categories such as sin, judgment and repentance as legitimate and meaningful categories, the presence of conditional language and unconditional language does not necessarily constitute an interpretative issue which is in need of a redaction-critical hypothesis or a reconstruction of ideological motivations in order to explain it.

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verses with an announcement of judgment that is going to happen and a conditionality that leaves things open, a divine ‘perhaps’ (v. 3) fraught with possibilities but also fragile and tenuous” (Miller, “Book of Jeremiah,” 772). Miller goes a step further in connecting the conditional dynamic expressed in this particular biblical text with a theological principle which he sees as operative across numerous biblical texts. He explains the tension described above as being centered around, or “managed by” the concept, the possibility that God might change his mind/relent... Miller calls this “divine openness” and sees it as “one of the profound themes of Scripture” (772-773). Cf. Miller, “Slow to Anger.”

<sup>158</sup> Reimer, “An Overlooked Term,” 340. Reimer’s proposal is that the ‘perhaps’ texts should be investigated as closely as the *niham* texts are, and should contribute to theological debate. He thinks there is a consistent trend among the texts considered: “Whether framed in terms of human action bearing on a possible divine outcome, or divine action bearing on a possible human outcome, the Hebrew Bible has within it a well-represented tradition that these actions and outcomes are best (at times) linked by ‘perhaps’, a ‘maybe’, allowing a freedom to the other which is recognized as well in the covenant relationship” (342).

It might also be suggested that theologically-oriented interpreters simply engage in a comparable avoidance or rationalization of what should properly be understood as failed prophecy, seeking to resolve the cognitive dissonance created by Jeremiah's and Micah's failed predictions in a way that mirrors the dynamic that Carroll suggests is operative within the world behind the text. However, such a construal would fail to take seriously the legitimacy of a frame of reference that is shaped by participation within a contemporary tradition that is understood to have an element of continuity in relation to the traditions that stand behind and are reflected in the biblical text. Arguably, Carroll's own approach is very much attuned to the dialectic between contemporary forms of understanding that might shape and illuminate one's exegesis of particular details.<sup>159</sup> It is by no means necessarily the case that dogmatic interests or commitments will inevitably be allowed to override honest exegesis; it may instead be suggested that if a text itself may be plausibly understood to raise distinctly theological issues and questions, then an interpreter situated within the context of a tradition that is engaged with and oriented toward much of the same theological subject matter might benefit from such hermeneutical resources. The effort to take these matters seriously in the course of interpretation certainly involves a different set of hermeneutical priorities from what will be operative within an approach that is oriented primarily toward questions of compositional history or the historical development of traditions; however, this need not be understood as taking the biblical text less seriously, or less critically, but rather as choosing to take seriously different elements in the course of an interpretation with an alternative overarching purpose.

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<sup>159</sup> This may be seen especially in the way he relies on the theories of Festinger to develop the account of cognitive dissonance that he uses as a model for understanding the dynamics operative within and behind prophetic literature. In another context, a more developed comparison between Carroll's appropriation of Festinger on *cognitive dissonance* and my own engagement with MacIntyre on *epistemological crises* would likely be illuminating.

## 6. Conclusion: Reading Jeremiah's Temple Sermon as Christian Scripture

The two accounts of Jeremiah's temple sermon constitute instances of prophetic discourse that involve an undeniable element of tension, portraying a moment of dramatic conflict between the prophet and his contemporaries, as well as an apparent affront to the cultic institutions and theological traditions most central to the people of Judah. The polemical thrust of Jer. 7:1–15 is complemented by a narrative of overt confrontation in 26:1–24, and the cumulative picture is, at the very least, suggestive of a conflict between the theological convictions expressed by the Jeremiah tradition and those adhered to by its opponents and interlocutors. However, the precise nature of the conflict envisaged by these texts remains a matter of interpretation, and the various possible construals are necessarily tradition-dependent, shaped by overarching hermeneutical frameworks that may or may not be explicitly engaged by their advocates.

The present study has attempted to demonstrate the inadequacy of interpretations that construe the temple and its role in mediating divine presence merely as a foil for Jeremiah's supposedly thoroughgoing Deuteronomistic theology. Such reasoning is perhaps typified in the comment of R. E. Clements, that "The opposition to the temple and its cult was taken up...forcibly by Jeremiah, *who saw it as a superstitious fetish*, which was blinding the people to a true faith in Yahweh."<sup>1</sup> This apparent conflict between theological traditions may be understood to be operative within the world behind the text on a number of levels: for some, it reflects a conflict between the historical prophet and his contemporaries, with Jeremiah disparaging the temple as a source of misplaced trust and a beacon of the false sense of security that is blinding his fellow Judahites; for others, the temple sermon is reflective of a broader incommensurability between prophetic and priestly perspectives within the development of ancient Israelite theology, or within the canonical presentation of the Old Testament itself; others have located the conflict primarily within reconstructions

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<sup>1</sup> Clements, *God and Temple*, 84 (my emphasis).

of the compositional history of the text, postulating a scenario in which tradents with mutually opposing theological commitments struggle for hermeneutical authority over the developing Jeremianic textual legacy.

Within the trajectory of modern Jeremiah scholarship, John Bright is representative of an older hermeneutical approach that construes the primary element of conflict within the world behind the text, as the lone prophet confronts his wayward and complacent generation. While such historicizing approaches were presumably undertaken with the aim of producing an unbiased, descriptive account of the situation that produced the biblical text, the benefit of hindsight makes it difficult to ignore the apparent biases that subtly portray Jeremiah as the Protestant hero, righteously assailing the cultic abuses and liturgical self-reliance representative of the Jewish and/or Catholic traditions. A striking example of a more overtly anti-cultic formulation of this interpretative approach is found in two essays from G.E. Wright's *The Rule of God: Essays in Biblical Theology*. Wright likens the Catholic liturgical tradition to rudimentary pagan conceptions of divine presence in Israel's ancient Near Eastern antecedents, suggesting that it inserts "a magical element" into the concept of God's presence in the midst of his people.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately (in his view), "Protestantism rejected the mass, and with it the whole temple theology as thus carried over into the Church. This meant a reinterpretation of the meaning of the edifice of worship, such as happened in the Deuteronomic theology."<sup>3</sup> He goes on to read the temple sermon as Jeremiah's brave stand against the "deceptive sincerity" of the priests, who were "promising the people of God security, based upon the presence of God in their midst," and thereby illustrating the perennial issue of the attempt to separate religious piety from common life."<sup>4</sup> Ironically, perhaps, even much more recent and decidedly non-Protestant accounts identify Jeremiah's perspective with a Deuteronomic theological perspective that is construed as an ancient Israelite analogue to many of the central concerns of the sixteenth century Reformation. For example, Benjamin Sommer regards Jeremiah's temple sermon as illustrative of the conflict between the *shem*

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<sup>2</sup> Wright, "God Amidst His People," 73-74. The author goes so far as to ridicule the doctrine of transubstantiation and the mass as "the effecting of atonement by a little drama," which puts "a non-Biblical twist" on the concept of divine presence.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, "God Amidst His People," 74.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, "Security and Faith," 84-85.

theology and the *kabod* theology, with the former representing the Jeremianic and Deuteronomistic perspective, which is likened to Paul Tillich's account of Protestantism as "a religion of the ear and not of the eye."<sup>5</sup>

Although the currently fashionable approaches dominant in Jeremiah studies achieve a near consensus in eschewing the confidence in the historicity of biblical portrayals that is on display in the work of Bright, it is arguably the case that redaction-critical proposals such as those of Thiel, Carroll and Sharp are no less dependent upon contemporary traditions of rationality in their frequently speculative construals of the identities and motivations responsible for the various compositional layers that they identify within the history of the canonical text's growth. Likewise, as Sommer explicitly affirms, the interpretations of particular biblical texts and the reconstructions of literary sources and theological traditions that characterize his work are deeply influenced by his contextual location and commitments as an observant Jewish interpreter and a professional biblical critic. These elements of hermeneutical tradition-dependence need not be lamented as necessarily problematic, although they should signal the contingencies associated with any particular proposal; rather, the tradition that an interpreter inhabits may be seen as a potentially rich resource for the interpretation of ancient texts and traditions.

In large part, the burden of this thesis has been to suggest that the tensions and complexities of Jeremiah's temple sermon, reflected no less in the subject matter of the two accounts than in their likely compositional histories, may be construed in a robust theological mode that not only offers a plausible alternative to previous hypotheses, but also calls into question some of their conclusions and assumptions. I have argued that both texts present the message of the prophet as an inherently conditional proclamation of divine judgment and, moreover, that Jer. 26 may be understood to function as an intratextual hermeneutical guide that confirms this interpretation of 7:1–15 in the context of its narrative re-contextualization of the former passage.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this concluding chapter is to retrace the contours of this argument, and to

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<sup>5</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 135.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Chapman, *Law and Prophets*, 111 on "canonical conclusions as hermeneutical guides."

provide a sketch of its implications for a theologically-oriented understanding of the message of Jeremiah's temple sermon as Christian scripture.

### *Summary of Argument*

The hermeneutical framework adopted within this thesis presupposes that critical rigor may be applied not only to elements of historical reconstruction and compositional complexity, but also to the theological subject matter that the biblical text bears witness to. Thus, I have sought to interpret the two accounts of Jeremiah's temple sermon, and their relationship to one another, in the context of a critical and dialectical engagement between biblical studies and theological discourse. In the second chapter I offered a critique of two influential interpretative paradigms by way of an extended engagement with representative proponents of each. I argued that the hypothesis according to which Jeremiah's perspective (or that of the [Deutero-]Jeremianic traditionists) is to be understood as a theological corrective to populist convictions regarding the inviolability of Zion and the absolute guarantee of divine protection offers neither the most compelling account of the temple sermon itself, nor the best reading of the biblical texts that are supposed to articulate this feature of Zion theology. In addition, I maintained that the conditional dynamic evident in both Jer. 7 and 26 may be understood as a feature of both explicitly conditional language and apparently unconditional warnings, and thus as central to the rhetorical message of the prophet's speech rather than merely a feature of editorial shaping in relation to opposing views. In the third chapter, I proposed that the concept of tradition that features so prominently in both redaction-critical and traditio-historical approaches to Hebrew Bible scholarship, not least in the representative accounts of the temple sermon considered here, may be usefully reframed by an explicitly theological account of the nature of tradition, informed by the philosophical contribution of Alasdair MacIntyre and the theological formulations of Yves Congar and others. I also attempted in this context to relate this reframing to existing theologically-oriented approaches to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament that emphasize the continuity between traditions that may be plausibly reconstructed behind the biblical texts and those that receive and interpret those texts as, in some sense, authoritative scripture.

These initial three chapters set the stage for the theologically-oriented readings of Jer. 7:1–15 and 26:1–24 presented in chapters four and five by evaluating existing proposals for the understanding of these texts and developing an alternative hermeneutical framework for their interpretation. I argued that the account of the temple sermon presented in Jer. 7 is more directly concerned with the issue of divine presence than is frequently realized, articulating both a conditional promise and corresponding threats of judgment that are designed to provoke the audience to change their course and thereby allow for the maintenance of YHWH's presence in their midst. I then proposed that Jer. 26 may be understood as a narrative recontextualization of the temple sermon, portraying an apparent trial scene that deconstructs in order to redirect the focus back to the conditional nature of the prophetic message. Moreover, I maintained that the relationship between these two texts may be construed as indicative of the phenomenon of inner-biblical interpretation, since key elements in chap. 26, not least vv. 3, 13, and 17–19, function as hermeneutical guides to the interpretation of Jer. 7:1–15 within the context of the developing Jeremianic tradition, while also becoming part of that tradition within the context of their immediate narrative setting. Although much of the reasoning adduced in defense of these readings is understandable and defensible within the established conventions of modern biblical criticism, I have also sought to set them within the framework of the 'plausibility structure' of the Christian tradition, wherein theological categories such as divine agency and divine and human freedom may be meaningfully employed in construing the dynamics of prophetic speech, human repentance and the contingencies of divine-human relationships.

### *Theological Implications*

Although I have attempted to show that there are significant problems with the two representative hermeneutical paradigms evaluated in chapter two, such that they are insufficient frameworks for an interpretation of Jer. 7 and 26, my disagreement with these paradigms is by no means limited to a skepticism with regard to their historical plausibility. Rather, from a theological perspective, my primary concern with both the inviolability hypothesis and the theory of conditional prophecy as a mere redactional intrusion comes down to my contention that such reading strategies function to let the

audience off the hook. Unless one is prepared to limit the focus of interpretation to a descriptive account of authorial intention and its corresponding reception within a proposed context of origin, a reading of the temple sermon must reckon with the book of Jeremiah's ongoing function as scripture within the context of Jewish and Christian traditions, thus signaling generations of readers and hearers for whom these passages have been understood as a divine address, an instance of divine revelation within each successive contemporary context. Such a hermeneutical recognition indicates that, for the vast majority of people who have interpreted these texts, it would be inconceivable that the meaning or significance of their prophetic discourse could be primarily directed to some element of conflict within the world behind the text.

If the contemporary reader of Jer. 7 or 26 understands the primary problem envisaged by these texts to be a faulty, populist, perhaps even heterodox understanding of the link between divine presence and assurance of protection, then the prophetic speech articulated therein is largely robbed of its potential to address or confront a contemporary audience. As long as the message and significance of the temple sermon remains in descriptive traditio-historical mode, many interpreters will be able to rest easy in the confident awareness that they do not share such faulty theological perspectives, but instead are safely aligned, more or less, with the orthodox Deutero-Jeremianic perspective authorized and celebrated by the text.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, if the canonical forms of Jer. 7 and 26 are construed merely, or at least primarily, as the result of historical processes involving a putative conflict between perspectives envisaging either predictions of irreversible judgment or conditional indications of the possibility of repentance, then these texts will likely be precluded from addressing a contemporary reader with their prophetic message(s). In other words, if the interpretative center of gravity is the compositional history of the world behind the text, and if the dynamics of that history are construed in terms that emphasize

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<sup>7</sup> It may be the case that theological convictions are held within a contemporary context that adopt a comparable view of the link between divine presence and that assurance of protection, health, or prosperity; however, even if opponents of such contemporary perspectives are inclined to see in them close analogues to the putative doctrine of Zion's inviolability, it is highly unlikely that any contemporary interpretative communities would readily assent to the positing of a link between their theological convictions and the objects of Jeremiah's fierce critiques in Jer. 7 and 26.



elements of conflict at the expense of continuity and coherence, then the pressure that the canonical form of the text might exert upon the world *in front* of the text is in danger of being obscured.

The interpretative posture and plausibility structure afforded by the Christian tradition offers a hermeneutical framework in which divine-human relationships are understood as an authentic feature of human existence, prophecy is construed as a relational phenomenon whereby God engages with people through his servants, and language of divine judgment may be understood as ultimately oriented toward provoking a change of heart and action. This framework need not ignore or deny elements of complexity or diversity that may very well stand behind the text, and feature in the process of its compositional development; however, the significance of these elements will be relativized in the light of an understanding of continuity between the traditions that have given rise to the canonical form of the biblical text and the tradition(s) that receive it as Christian scripture. Within such an interpretative context, the contemporary reader of Jeremiah's temple sermon is enabled not only to recognize the features of these texts that signal their provenance and development, but also to hear and respond to their subject matter with something of the urgency and seriousness that is envisaged by the texts themselves.



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